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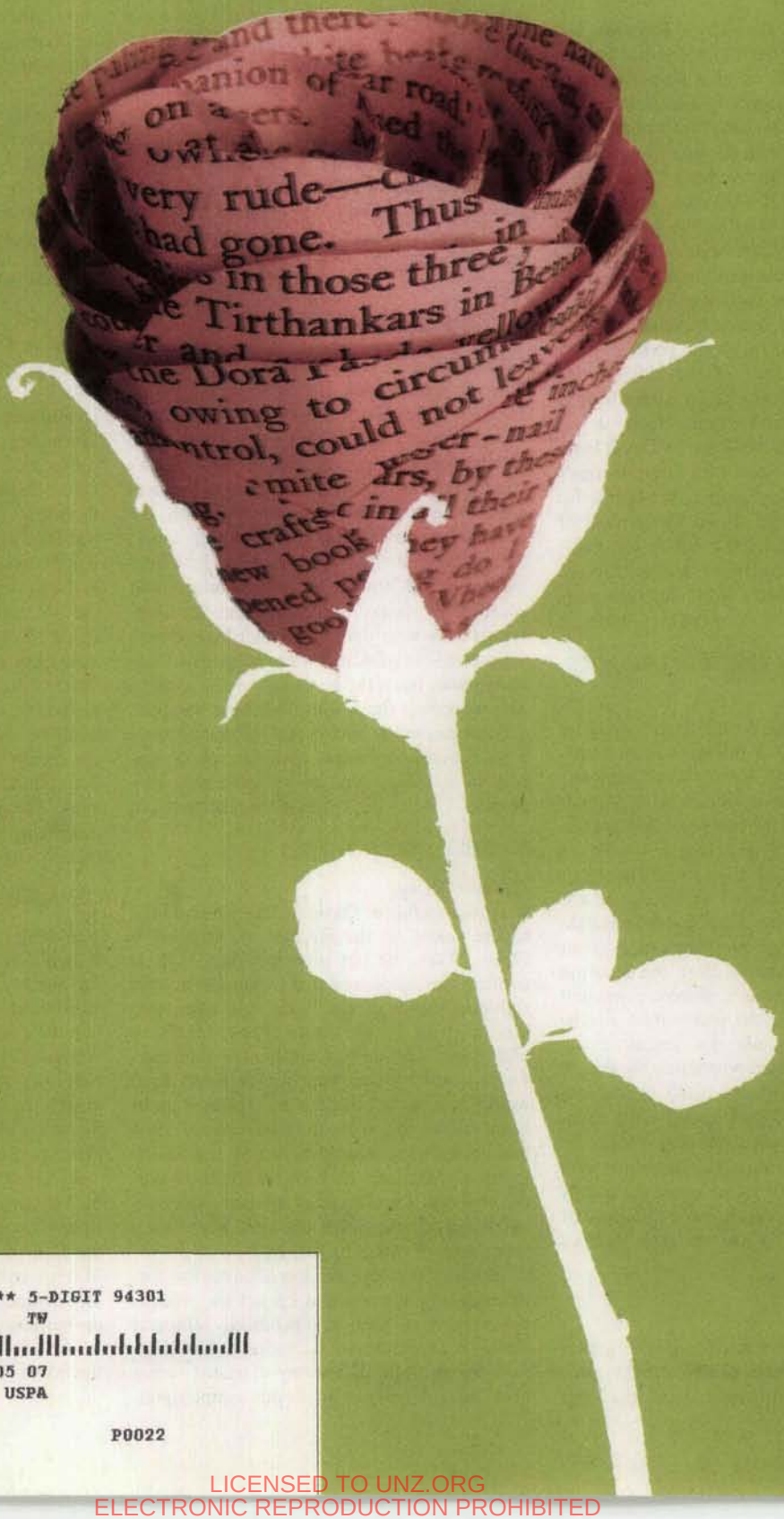

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LETTERS

R.O. BLECHMAN

JOHN BROWN, RATIONAL HERO

New York City

■ I'm an admirer of both David Reynolds and Martin Duberman, but I'm sorry that Duberman, like Barbara Ehrenreich in the *New York Times* and Adam Gopnik in *The New Yorker*, seems to see Reynolds as the first reputable historian to argue that John Brown was not insane but a rational and effective hero ["The Avenging Angel," May 23]. All these enthusiastic critics ignore Albert Fried's 1978 *John Brown's Journey: Notes and Reflections on His America and Mine.* Fried challenged the work of Allan Nevins and C. Vann Woodward, who argued that Brown was mad, a monomaniac.

Viewing Brown through the perspective of the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, Fried saw the deep moral rationality and effectiveness of Brown's life and actions. His book was viciously assaulted in the *Times* by David Donald, a Southern historian who had previously suggested that Charles Sumner, the abolitionist senator, was demented. Fried was critical of the historical establishment, which invariably identified with the moderates in opposition to the "extremists." Fried's work deserves more attention. MICHAEL WRESZIN

PICKS BONE WITH EINSTEIN GROUPIES

Amherst, Mass.

■ I was pleased to see Joshua Foer's excellent review of the reissue of the Born-Einstein letters ["The Other 1905 Revolution," May 16]. However, I have a bone to pick with popular characterizations of the two most famous features of the theory: One is that $E = mc^2$ is a logical consequence of the special theory of relativity (a claim repeated by Foer), and the other, that nothing can travel faster than light was a starting assumption of the theory (Foer does not make this claim). Both the equation and the limiting speed are, indeed, consistent with and integral to the elaboration of the theory, though they are not simply consequences of the standard postulates. Neither in the fifth paper in 1905 nor in his subsequent several attempts did Einstein derive the equation from the basic postulates purely logically. Additional (quite profound) assumptions were needed, and the fact that he made them only adds to Einstein's revolutionary boldness of those years. KANNAN JAGANNATHAN

FOER REPLIES

Washington, DC

■ Determining whether one thing is a "logical consequence" of another can be a tricky game of semantics. Einstein himself wrote in a letter to Conrad Habicht in the summer of 1905, "A consequence of the study on electrodynamics [the special theory of relativity] did cross my mind. Namely, the relativity principle, in association with Maxwell's fundamental equations, requires that the mass be the direct measure of the energy contained in a body; light carries mass with it." It's true that Einstein had to do more than just rearrange a few variables to get from his monumental June paper on relativity to September's three-page derivation of $E = mc^2$, but it's also true that had Einstein not made this leap, someone else would have made it before long. JOSHUA FOER

SECOND-CLASS JEWS?

West Hartford, Conn.

■ In his May 2 review of Lisa Hajjar's *Courting Conflict: The Israeli Military Court System in the West Bank and Gaza*, "Before the Law," Neve Gordon quite properly highlights the system's employment of Druse translators but neglects a most telling aspect of this policy, namely, the deliberate neglect of Mizrahi Jews for this work. Although hundreds of thousands of Jews have immigrated to Israel from Arab countries and continue to speak Arabic at home, the Ashkenazi Jews who dominate Israel have always suppressed the Middle Eastern culture of these immigrants. Since the beginning of the modern Zionist project the Jewish homeland has been a European settler society. Employing Mizrahi Jews as translators would encourage public display of a culture that most Ashkenazi Jews despise. SAMUEL GOLDBERGER

SO MUCH OLDER THEN...

Hadensville, Va.

■ I am grateful for David Yaffe's voice, added to the voices on the life and works of Bob Dylan ["Tangled Up in Bob," April 25]. It confirms my suspicions that Dylan was not the righteous savior of the 1960s that many held him up to be. As for the "soft spot for Barry Goldwater," I have a similar defect of character. I often wonder what benefits (or detriments) would have been realized if my Young Republican efforts for Senator Goldwater in 1964 had been rewarded in the defeat of "Landslide Lyndon" Johnson. There is no question that the civil rights gains under Johnson were way overdue, and both Goldwater and I were wrong about a lot of things back then.

But a lot of water has flowed under the statist bridges built since, and I reject the predictable, superficial, knee-jerk dichotomy of liberal versus conservative so ludicrously dominant, for a more useful dichotomy of statist versus libertarian, if we must divide our complex politics into only two camps (which we shouldn't). I now consider myself a raging civil libertarian, but I fully support the Second Amendment and still harbor the soft spot for Goldwater. Does that make me a "conservative" card-carrying member of the ACLU, even if I totally disbelieve today's self-serving warmongers?

Many of Dylan's works are stubbornly truthful, even if the messenger has feet of clay. No matter. He provided a useful phrase we should all embrace: "Don't follow leaders; watch the parking meters." H. WATKINS ELLERSON

CHANNELING VONNEGUT?

New York City

■ Vivian Gornick's analysis of Jonathan Safran Foer's fiction is right on target; the author's layers of story are intricate, but the history is miniaturized ["About a Boy," April 25]. Gornick quotes the long passage in which the protagonist of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* "imagines the whole of September 11 in reverse: 'The plane would have flown backward away from [Dad], all the way to Boston.'" Kurt Vonnegut has a strikingly similar passage in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, also about death from the air: the firebombing of Dresden (which killed 130,000). Vonnegut, though, has Tralfamadorian aliens reverse a televised film about World War II bombing: The fires subside as the bombs rise back up into the planes and the bombers fly backward to Britain. At the end the metals in the bombs are buried deep underground, where they can never harm anyone again. Despite the literary echoes, Vonnegut's despairing satire is very far from the self-pity of Foer's character. MARGARET LAMB

COMMIES & PINKOS & REDS, OH MY!

New York City

■ In a thoughtful review ["The Impermanent Revolution," March 14] of the new Verso edition of Isaac Deutscher's classic three-volume biography of Leon Trotsky, Ronald Aronson blames the horrors of Stalinism on the "original sin" of the Bolsheviks: seizing power in November 1917 with the alleged intention of establishing a single-party state. He characterizes the Russian Revolution as a "leap into the blue" and "a radical act of will" on the part of the Bolsheviks. Their "revolutionary zeal," according to Aronson, "flew in the face of sober Marxist analysis—that of Martov and the Mensheviks," which insisted on "democracy and a high level of economic development" as prerequisites for socialism.

Aronson neglects to mention, however, that the Bolsheviks were not the only ones to fail the

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EDITORIALS

Judicial Wars Aren't Over

The Senate battle over the judicial filibuster was framed as a titanic struggle between Democrats and Republicans that ended in a reasonable compromise. But the conflict was not a partisan rules fight. What was at stake was the composition of the independent judiciary and the American system of checks and balances—which includes the balance of power between the minority and the majority in Congress and the delicate balance between the Senate and the White House.

The final—if it is final—resolution prevented the Republican leadership and its far-right supporters from eliminating the judicial filibuster, which they detest as an obstacle to their crusade to pack the courts with judges who will limit individual rights and bolster corporate interests. The filibuster still exists, though in a severely weakened condition, as all sides prepare for the expected clash over the next Supreme Court vacancy.

But stopping the "nuclear option" advocates from getting all they wanted came at a high cost. The Democrats who negotiated the arrangement agreed to permit three of Bush's worst judicial nominees—Priscilla Owen, William Pryor Jr. and Janice Rogers Brown—to receive up-or-down votes, knowing they'd likely be approved (as Owen already has). Owen routinely sides with corporations against people and has inserted her personal antiabortion views into a court decision. Pryor has opposed antidiscrimination and environmental protection laws. Brown has declared government the enemy of civilization. Recently, she argued that people of faith are "embroiled in a war against secular humanists who threatened to divorce America from its religious roots." These judges—who question the constitutionality of Social Security, minimum wage laws, the forty-hour workweek and abortion rights—will pose a threat for decades to come.

Moreover, the deal undermines the filibuster, which can be used only "under extraordinary circumstances." Consequently, the seven Republican senators who participated in arranging it now have something akin to veto power over the Democrats' use of a judicial filibuster, and there is no guarantee that Democrats can wield it to block a Supreme Court nominee.

Still, Democrats and their allies in the judicial wars are claiming victory (as some social conservatives, like James Dobson, are depicting the deal as a terrible defeat). They point to the fact that one or two other Bush nominees may be stopped because of the compromise. They also note that the filibuster will be available in the future. And it's possible that this was the best deal the Democrats could have struck, as the GOP seemed to have enough votes to launch the nuclear option and kill the filibuster. Though public opinion and editorial boards were opposed to that maneuver—once again, radical Republicans came across as being out of the mainstream—there was no telling which party would have won the postnuclear blame game. Democrats could have ended up with the filibuster dead, all Bush nominees approved and a reputation for obstructionism.

This deal has yielded an uneasy peace, one arguably more beneficial to Republicans than Democrats, but it doesn't resolve the conflict. What was at stake—a judiciary that protects, not eviscerates, rights—is still at stake. Democrats should hope the crisis has fired up their base, for the judicial wars will, and must, continue.

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COMMENT

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US Arms for Terrorists?

The Colombian police heard in early May that a big deal was going down inside a gated luxury community southwest of Bogotá. On May 3 they followed Colombian suspects, two of whom turned out to be retired Colombian Army officers, to a house filled with twenty-nine metal crates of arms and 32,000 rounds of ammunition. The police were still taking inventory of the cache when two more suspects knocked on the door. The police arrested them, only to learn they were US soldiers. The Colombian police said the arms were bound for an illegal paramilitary group that the State Department considers to be both a drug-trafficking and a terrorist organization.

The community of Carmen de Apicalá, where the arms were found, is only a short drive from Colombia's Tolemaida military base, home to US Black Hawk helicopters and the place where US Special Forces train Colombian troops in combat skills. For convenience as well as security, many US military personnel and contractors rent condominiums in Carmen de Apicalá. "It's a lot of ammunition, and it's a very suspicious case," Colombia's police commander, Gen. Jorge Castro, told local radio. Colombian lawmakers in Bogotá said the US Ambassador, William Wood, should explain the circumstances to the Colombian Congress.

The State Department spokesman in Washington, Richard Boucher, denied that the arms were part of a secret US effort to arm Colombian paramilitaries. But he still refuses to say whether the arms are part of the unprecedented $3.3 billion in military aid the United States began sending in 2000 as part of Plan Colombia. The Colombian attorney general's office, which is now investigating the case, said that the arms had been diverted from US stockpiles. The Colombian television station RCN broadcast footage of arms with US markings.

The case comes at a time when the Colombian government, led by President Álvaro Uribe, is negotiating a broad amnesty for Colombian paramilitaries. Known by their supporters as "self-defense" groups, Colombian paramilitaries have long been responsible for most of the country's politically motivated massacres and murders, which often target peasants, trade unionists and students they suspect of supporting leftist guerrillas. The rightist paramilitaries have also long been accused of secretly collaborating with the military to carry out death squad crimes.

"I think that it's probably fair to say that there is [*sic*] some episodes of contact between Colombian military and these so-called self-defense forces," Roger Noriega, the senior State Department official for Latin America, told Congress during questioning eight days after the Bogotá arrests, adding that such "episodes" are against Colombian law and US policy. Yet, in nearly every region of the country, Colombian military officers of all ranks have been found to be secretly collaborating with rightist paramilitaries, and only a few have ever been seriously prosecuted.

The United States itself has long been ambivalent about Colombia's paramilitaries. Back in the 1960s the US military, according to its own documents, encouraged the Colombian military to organize rightist paramilitary forces to help fight leftist guerrillas. By the early 1980s, Colombian drug traffickers and large land-

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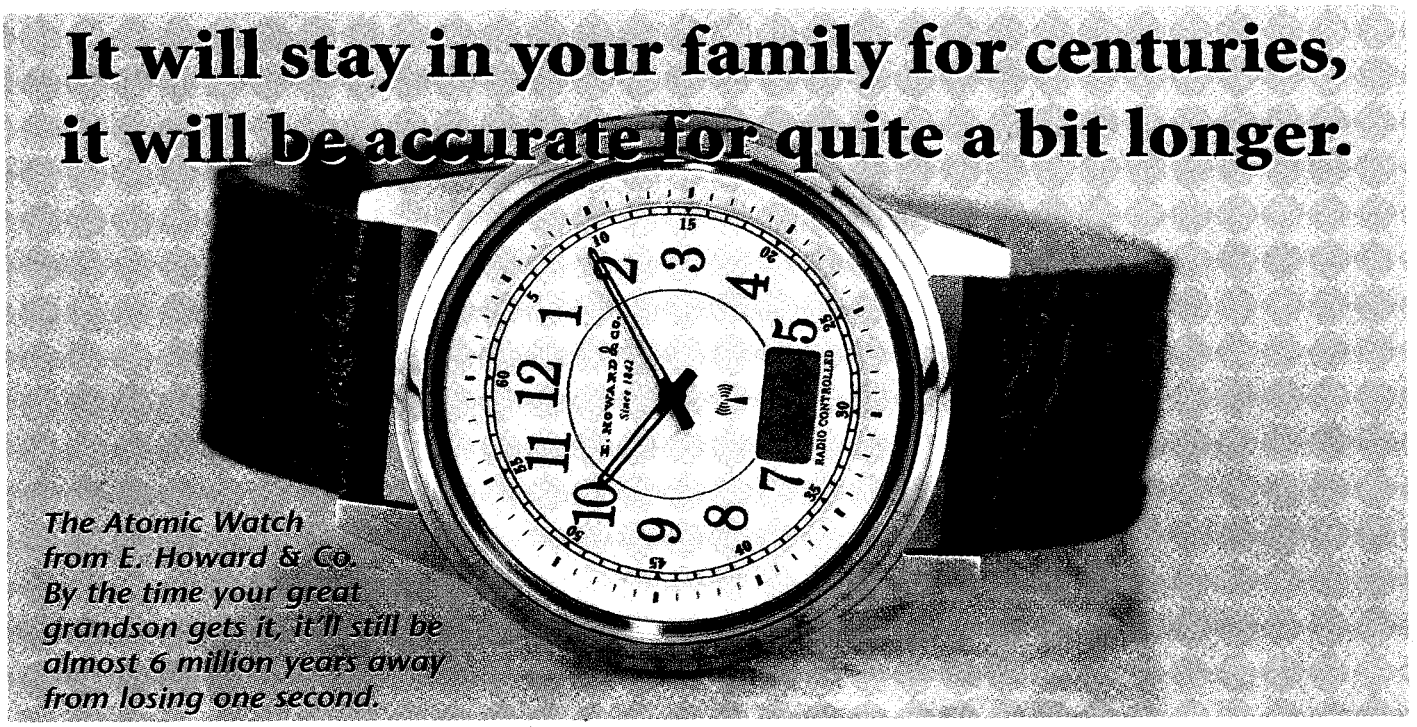

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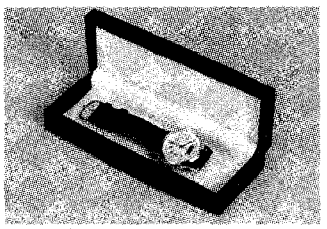

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COMMENT

owners together organized the paramilitaries into a national force to ward off kidnappings and other forms of extortion by leftist guerrillas. But by the end of the decade, the government had outlawed paramilitaries after one group trained by the late drug lord Pablo Escobar blew up a Colombian airliner.

The Colombian military soon found a new way to maintain contacts with illegal paramilitaries, however. In the fall of 1990, according to a letter from the Pentagon to Senator Patrick Leahy, the US military helped its Colombian counterpart make its intelligence networks "more efficient and effective." It was instructed, according to an April 1991 classified Colombian military order, to keep its operations "covert" and "compartmentalized," to use only "retired or active-duty Officers or Non-commissioned Officers" as liaisons, and not to put orders "in writing."

One new intelligence network killed at least fifty-seven people, including trade unionists, community leaders and a journalist, according to judicial testimony. But charges were dropped after most of the witnesses were either murdered or disappeared. In 2001 a former Colombian Army general, Rito Alejo del Rio, was arrested by Colombian authorities from the attorney general's office on charges that he allegedly collaborated with illegal paramilitaries. But these charges, too, were soon dismissed, and the country's top two civilian prosecutors fled the country.

Later that year (one day before 9/11, ironically), the US State Department finally put Colombia's largest paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, or AUC, on its list of terrorist organizations. In 2002 US authorities announced that the AUC was implicated in trading drugs for arms with none other than Al Qaeda. US authorities finally began indicting more Colombian rightist paramilitary leaders on drug charges, after having already indicted Colombian leftist guerrilla leaders on drug charges.

The May arrests of two US military officers for allegedly running arms to AUC paramilitaries raises many questions. US warrant officer Allan Tanquary and Sgt. Jesus Hernandez are now back in the United States, where officials say they may face criminal charges. "We're committed," said spokesman Boucher, "to a full investigation."

FRANK SMYTH

Frank Smyth is a freelance journalist and co-author of Colombia's Killer Networks: The Military-Paramilitary Partnership and the United States, *published by Human Rights Watch.*

CALVIN TRILLIN

Bolton Chases French Ambassador Up Tree

(Another Headline in the Future of John Bolton as American Ambassador to the United Nations)

The Frenchman voted wrong, in Bolton's mind—
Against a war. He doubted we would find
These weapons just where Bolton said they were,
Despite the fact that Bolton seemed so sure.
As Bolton shouted that the French were yellow,
His face took on the shade of cherry Jell-O.
The Frenchman thought it prudent then to flee,
And that's when Bolton chased him up a tree.
"How dare you!" Bolton shouted from below,
As with his shoe he struck the trunk a blow.
The French Ambassador was plainly scared.
He kept repeating "*Zut, alors!*" and "*Merde!*"
The White House, backing Bolton, said that he'll
Continue putting forth our case with zeal.

Kushner on Miller

Arthur Miller died on Bertolt Brecht's birthday. There are two ways in which this means nothing at all: I'm sure Arthur didn't plan it, and the two playwrights, apart from being universally described, and self-identified, as "political writers," don't have all that much in common. But their difference is interesting. Arthur Miller's was a great voice, one of the principal voices, raised in opposition, calling for resistance, offering critical scrutiny and lamentation—in other words, he was politically progressive, as politically progressive is best defined in these dark times. He demanded that we must be able to answer, on behalf of our plays, our endeavors, our lives, a really tough question, one that Arthur wrote was the chief and, in a sense, only reason for writing and speaking: "What is its relevancy," he asks, "to the survival of the race? Not," he stipulates, "the American race, or the Jewish race, or the German race, but the human race." He demanded that our work and our lives have some relevance to human survival. The question implies anxiety about that survival, a refusal of complacency, an acknowledgment that there is a human community for which each of us bears responsibility and a warning that we are in danger. Miller tells us that what we do, the things we choose to struggle with in art and elsewhere, can have some effect on the outcome. There is, in other words, reason to hope, and change is possible. Arthur was a grieving pessimist, but what truly progressive person isn't?

He was one of those political people who refused an identification with a specific race or nation or movement or party. He certainly wasn't a communist, and he wasn't a socialist. During the Depression, his grandfather, whom Arthur described as "a Republican all his life...[with] bags under his eyes like von Hindenburg," shocked the family by turning to his unemployed grandson one night after dinner and saying, "You know what you ought to do? You ought to go to Russia."

"The silence that fell" in the dining room, Arthur wrote, "is better described as a vacuum so powerful it threatened to suck the walls in. Even my father woke up on the couch. I asked [my grandfather] why I should go to Russia.

"Because [he answered] in Russia they haven't got anything. Here they got too much. You can't sell anything anymore. You

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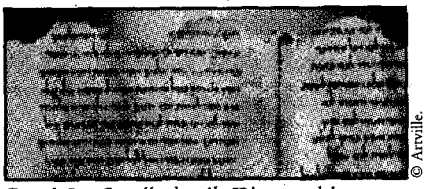

Dead Sea Scroll, detail. Discussed in Lecture 5.

In the first centuries after Christ, there was no New Testament. However, books of Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Apocalypses other than those that would eventually form the New Testament existed, were widely read, and were fervently followed by groups of early Christians.

Relying on the many different Scriptures available, Christians held beliefs that today would be considered bizarre: some believed there were 2, 12 or as many as 30 gods; some held that a malicious deity, rather than one God, created the world; some maintained that Christ's death and resurrection had nothing to do with salvation; others insisted that Christ never died at all.

What did these "other" Scriptures say? Do they exist today? How could such outlandish ideas ever be considered Christian? If such beliefs were once common, why do they no longer exist? These are just a few of the many provocative questions that arise from this course in **Lost Christianities**.

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As a major theme of this course, you will follow the struggle for orthodoxy—or "right belief"—among the various early Christian groups. You will see how Christianity developed through its early and lost writings and you will explore the development of the New Testament into an approved canon of Scripture.

Your Professor

Bart D. Ehrman (Ph.D., Princeton Theological Seminary) is the James A. Gray Professor and Chair of the Department of Religious Studies at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has won several teaching awards, including the Students' Undergraduate Teaching Award and the Bowman and Gordon Gray Award for Excellence in Teaching. Professor Ehrman has written or edited 12 books.

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COMMENT

go to Russia and open a chain of clothing stores; you could do a big business. That's a new country, Russia."

"'But,' I said, 'you can't do that there.'

'Why not?' he said, disbelieving.

'The government owns the stores there.' His face would have put fears into Karl Marx himself. 'Them bastards,' he said, and went back to his paper."

The grandson was a great believer in democracy and self-reliance and in anything conducive to and supportive of individual human dignity and integrity. His drama was the drama of individual integrity, individual wholeness or completeness or repleteness versus unaccountable power—or perhaps one could say of the individual versus history. And one way Arthur Miller's theater and politics differ from a writer like Brecht's is that Arthur focused his critical gaze, and located his sense of political struggle, within the arena of an individual consciousness, in an important sense his own individual consciousness. Would it be correct to say that he was not a joiner of parties or group identities because, a loyalist only to the human race, he manifested that loyalty by being true to himself? Though he was clearly interested in history, he was uncomfortable writing about it. *The Crucible* and *Incident at Vichy* are not, finally, historical plays. Each sets its scene in the midst of a historical crime in progress, but soon the great dramatist that Arthur Miller was has turned his unsparing, unblinking, loving intelligence away from the grand-scale horror to demand of a single human being: Never mind all that out there, as overwhelming as it is. Even in the face of horror you must still ask yourself, and hard as it is, you are capable of asking it: What do you mean to yourself, what do you know yourself to be? What, in other words, is your relevance to the survival of the race?

He wasn't interested in the examination of history as the opportunity to illuminate metatheories about the ultimate direction the human community was taking. Arthur Miller was one of those very rare people whose politics were inseparable from the drama of his personal integrity. He was his own proving ground; he felt his successes and his failures as a human being were consequential to something greater than himself, and so they were publicly examined and, in a sense, the only thing worth talking about. He wasn't certain that a single individual has relevance to our collective survival, but he saw no other question worth pursuing.

He once wrote that he stopped studying economics as an undergraduate because economics, as it was and is taught, can "measure the giant's footsteps but not look into his eyes." His observation reflects his indebtedness to left political analysis—a central tenet of which is the critical consideration of the human, ethical and political meanings of money, rather than the mere prognostication of its tides and currents—and it also reflects his conviction, or perhaps predilection, or natural inclination, even when considering the giant, to look for truth by looking into his eyes, the windows of the soul. Arthur Miller had the curse of empathy, even for the enemy. Humans justify themselves to themselves, even bad humans, and Arthur the playwright always wanted to know how and why. Look into his eyes.

He made it clear in his plays and his essays that his critical thinking and social consciousness had their genesis in the red

In Fact . . .

ENCOURAGING WORDS

■ Susan Eaton writes: In the summer of 1963, historian Howard Zinn opened a letter from Albert Manley, president of Spelman College in Atlanta, where Zinn was a tenured professor. Manley told Zinn he was fired. Everyone at Spelman knew that Manley disapproved of Zinn's support of students protesting curfews and other restrictions at the historically black women's college. Zinn also often joined students demonstrating against racial segregation. Years later, the American Association of University Professors ruled that Manley had violated Zinn's academic freedom. By that time Zinn was teaching at Boston University, where he would write the bestselling *A People's History of the United States*. This past November, Zinn, now 82, found another letter from Spelman in his mailbox. "Spelman College wishes to bestow upon you...an honorary degree," wrote president Beverly Daniel Tatum. "We would like to honor your distinguished career and your extraordinary example of leadership, activism and social responsibility." In a handwritten note, Tatum added: "It would be wonderful to bestow this long overdue honor." On May 15 Zinn delivered the commencement address at Spelman. His subject: "Against Discouragement." In his 1994 memoir Zinn writes: "I keep encountering people who, in spite of all the evidence of terrible things happening everywhere, give me hope."

EYES ON THE PRIZES

■ We have been notified that *The Nation* has won one of the American Bar Association's annual Silver Gavel magazine awards for our special issue "Brown at 50" (May 3, 2004), honoring the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the historic decision killing "separate but equal." We've also learned that Russell Jacoby's "The New PC: Crybaby Conservatives" (April 4) has won a Project Censored award. These go to the year's twenty-five most important underreported news stories. Project Censored is based at Sonoma State University.

MINORITY/MAJORITY

■ **Permanent Minority.** Just weeks after passage of the credit card industry–written bankruptcy bill, Democratic Representative Paul Kanjorski is writing legislation with Republicans to allow predatory lenders to raise fees and avoid state usury laws.

■ **Toward the Majority.** Democratic Representatives Brad Miller, Barney Frank and Mel Watt have written an alternative to Kanjorski's bill that would crack down on predatory lenders, helping Democrats make banks' abuse of the middle class a major issue. —DAVID SIROTA

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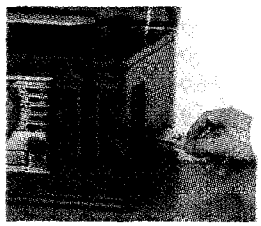

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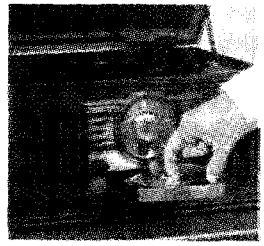

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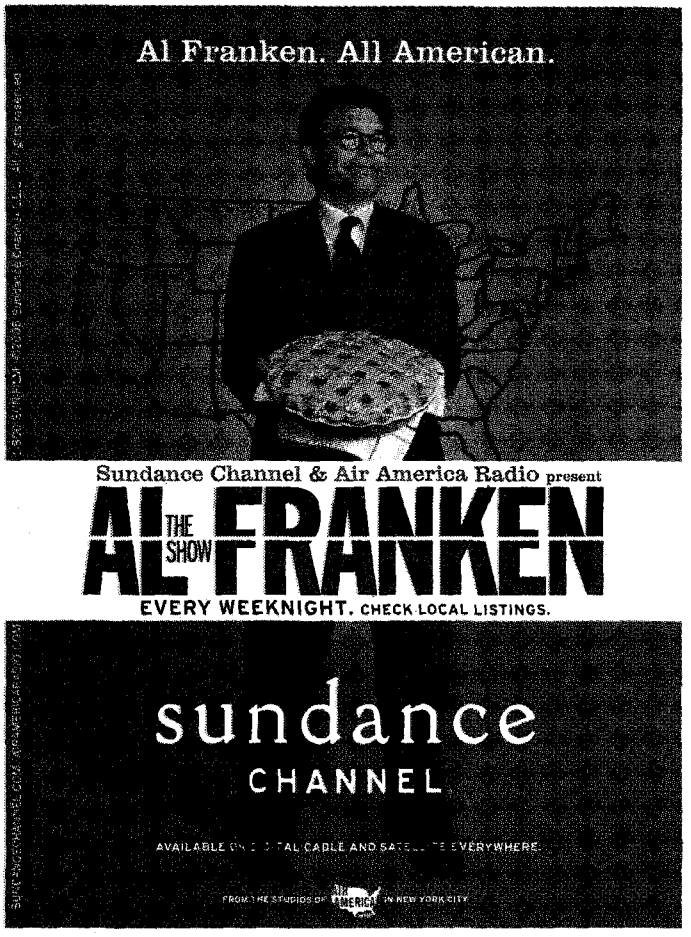
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politics that were pervasive when he was growing up, a politics catalyzed by the suffering he witnessed and experienced in the Great Depression, a politics shaped in response to the toxic, obnoxious valorization of greed always, always re-emerging in American history as a bedrock tenet of the political right. Although he refused the mechanical determinism of the unthinking Marxist left, he created in his greatest play a drama in which it is impossible to avoid thinking about economics—money—in any attempt to render coherent the human tragedy unfolding before you. Consider the Lomans: What has brought darkness down upon this family? Their flaws are part of their tragedy, but only a part—every flaw is magnified, distorted, made fatal by, well, alienation, by the market, where the pressure is inhuman and the human is expendable. Consider the moment when the Nothing of tragedy is enunciated, and annunciated, in *Death of a Salesman*, Biff and Willy's final fight ("Pop, I'm nothing! I'm nothing, Pop! Can't you understand that? There's no spite in it anymore. I'm just what I am, that's all. Will you let me go, for Christ's sake?"). It's tragic negation, vast and shatteringly intimate; everything is annihilated, and at the same time something new is being born. It's "nothing" of the tragedies of Euripides and Shakespeare, and in Miller's postwar, marketplace masterpiece, one hears an echo of another "nothing," tragic but also political—namely, "You have nothing to lose but your chains."

If Arthur's Emersonian temperament saved him from the terrible mistakes of the doctrinaire left of his time, if his habits of scrupulousness and independence carried him into a healthy, immensely vital skepticism, if he refused partisanship, he also never ceased reminding us of his indebtedness to, indeed his affinity with, the left, with progressive thought. He never became a cynic, or a nihilist, or an ego-anarchist, or a despoiler of humanist utopian dreams, or a neocon. His great personal courage and his graceful confidence in his stature and talents made it unnecessary for him to cuddle up to power elites, allowed him to retain his sympathy, his affinity for the disinherited, the marginal and the powerless. He never wanted us to forget that without economic justice, the concept of social justice is an absurdity and, worse, a lie.

I first saw Arthur Miller in person at the 1994 Tony Awards, when I sat behind him, too unnerved to introduce myself; for the whole evening I stared at the back of his head, which was far, far more interesting to me than anything transpiring onstage. Inside this impressive cranium, inside this dome, I thought to myself, Willy Loman was conceived—for an American playwright, a place comparable in sacrosanctity to the Ark of the Covenant or the Bodhi Tree or the Manger in Bethlehem. I wanted to touch the head, but I worried its owner might object. The ceremonies ended, and I'd missed my opportunity to make contact with the quarry whence came one of the postwar pillars upon which the stature of serious American playwriting rests.

Thanks to my friend Oskar Eustis I got to meet Arthur several years later, in Providence, Rhode Island, when I presented him with an award. On that occasion I had the chance to thank him personally. I said, "Mr. Miller, yours is a career and a body of work every playwright envies and wishes were her or his own; yours is the difficult standard against which we are measured and measure ourselves. For many sleepless nights and days of de-

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COMMENT

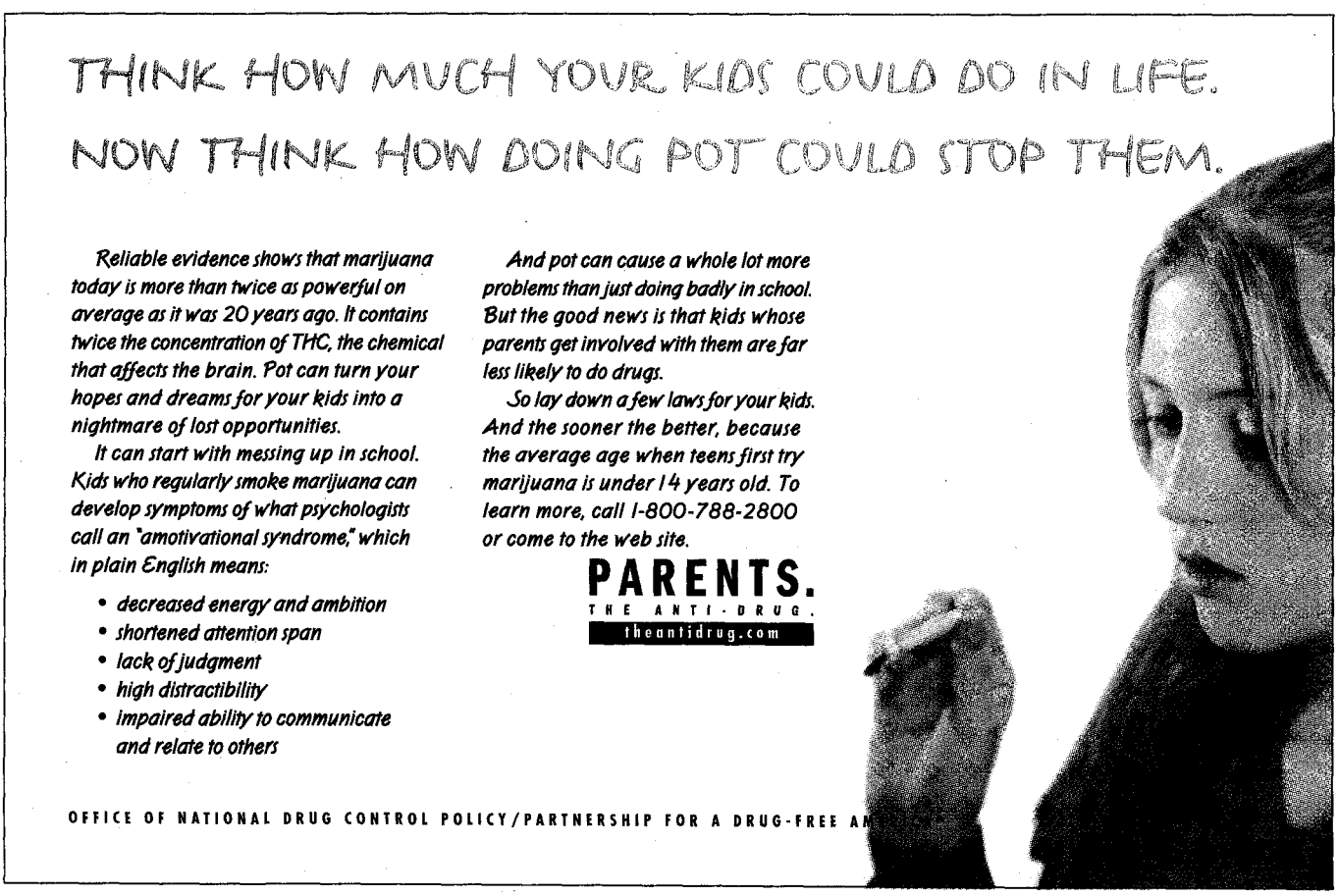
spair, I want to say thanks a lot; and for making my heart break, and burst into flames, time and time again, since the night, when I was 6 years old, I saw my mother play Linda Loman in a Louisiana community theater production of *Salesman*, and I think at that moment secretly deciding I wanted to be a playwright. Seeing *Incident at Vichy* on TV a few years later, I admitted to myself the decision I'd made. Watching splendid recent revivals of *View From the Bridge*, *Salesman*, *The Crucible*, I have gone home, chastened, to re-question all my assumptions about what playwriting is and how one ought to do it. And for always being there, on my bookshelf, when people say that real art can't be political, or that a real artist can't also be a political activist; your life and work are there to remind me what preposterous canards those are—for all this, I want to say thanks a lot."

For American playwrights who come after Arthur Miller, there is of course an unpayable debt. Those of us who seek mastery of dramatic realist narrative have his plays to try to emulate. Scene after scene, they are perhaps our best constructed plays, works of a master carpenter/builder. Those of us who seek not mastery but new ways of making theater have to emulate his refusal to sit comfortably where *Salesman* enthroned him. Arthur once praised Tennessee Williams for a "restless inconsolability with his solutions which is inevitable in a genuine writer," for making "an assault upon his own viewpoint in an attempt to break it up and reform it on a wider circumference."

American playwrights have most to learn from the sound of Arthur Miller's voice: Humility, decency, generosity are its trademarks. Turn down the braying of ego, it says to us, turn down the chatter of entertainment, the whine of pornographic sensuality and prurience, abandon the practice of rendering judgment as an expression of isolation, superstition and terror, and reach for a deeper judgment, the kind of judgment that pulls a person beyond his expected reach toward something more than any single human animal ought to be capable of—toward something shared, communal, maybe even toward something universal, maybe even toward God. It's a path to knowing that is the birthright of dramatists and "genuine writers." It seems to me difficult because it's a lonely path, and Jewish in its demanding interiority. It's Jewish also in its faith that words have an awesome, almost sacred, power, force, weight. God, or the world, is listening, Arthur Miller reminds us, and when you speak, when you write, God, or the world, is also speaking and writing. "A great drama is a great jurisprudence," Arthur wrote. "Balance is all. It will evade us until we can once again see man as a whole, until sensitivity and power, justice and necessity are utterly face to face, until authority's justifications and rebellion's too are tracked even to those heights where the breath fails, where—because the largest point of view as well as the smaller has spoken—truly, the rest is silence."

TONY KUSHNER

Tony Kushner is a playwright. He delivered these remarks at a memorial service for Arthur Miller held at the Majestic Theater in New York City.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JONATHAN SCHELL

A Revolution in American Nuclear Policy

A metaphorical "nuclear option"—the cutoff of debate in the Senate on judicial nominees—has just been defused, but a literal nuclear option, called "global strike," has been created in its place. In a shocking innovation in American nuclear policy, recently disclosed in the *Washington Post* by military analyst William Arkin, the Administration has created and placed on continuous high alert a force whereby the President can launch a pinpoint strike, including a nuclear strike, anywhere on earth with a few hours' notice. The senatorial "nuclear option" was covered extensively, but somehow this actual nuclear option—a "full-spectrum" capability (in the words of the presidential order) with "precision kinetic (nuclear and conventional) and non-kinetic (elements of space and information operations)"—was almost entirely ignored.

The order to enable the force, Arkin writes, was given by George W. Bush in January 2003. In July 2004 Gen. Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated to Adm. James Ellis Jr., then-commander of Stratcom, "the President charged you to 'be ready to strike at any moment's notice in any dark corner of the world' [and] that's exactly what you've done." And last fall, Lieut. Gen. Bruce Carlson, commander of the Eighth Air Force, stated, "We have the capacity to plan and execute global strikes."

These actions make operational a revolution in US nuclear policy. It was foreshadowed by the Nuclear Posture Review Report of 2002, also widely ignored, which announced nuclear targeting of, among others, China, North Korea, Iraq, Iran, Syria and Libya. The review also recommended new facilities for the manufacture of nuclear bombs and the study of an array of new delivery vehicles, including a new ICBM in 2020, a new submarine-launched ballistic missile in 2029 and a new heavy bomber in 2040. The review, in turn, grew out of Bush's broader new military strategy of pre-emptive war, articulated in the 2002 White House document the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, which states, "We cannot let our enemies strike first." The extraordinary ambition of the Bush policy is suggested by a comment made in a Senate hearing in April by Linton Brooks, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, who explained that the Defense Secretary wanted "bunker buster" nuclear bombs because "it is unwise for there to be anything that's beyond the reach of US power."

The incorporation of nuclear weapons into the global strike option, casting a new shadow of nuclear danger over the entire planet, raises fundamental questions. Perhaps the most important is why the United States, which now possesses the strongest conventional military forces in the world, feels the need to add to them a new global nuclear threat. The mystery deepens when you reflect that nothing could be more calculated to goad other nations into nuclear proliferation.

Could it be that the United States, now routinely called the greatest empire since Rome, simply feels the need to assert its dominance in the nuclear sphere? History suggests a different explanation. In the past, reliance on nuclear arms has in fact varied inversely with reliance on conventional arms. In the very first weeks of the nuclear age, when the American public was demanding demobilization of US forces in Europe after World War II, the US monopoly on the bomb gave it the confidence to adopt a bold stance in postwar negotiations with the Soviet Union over Europe. The practice of offsetting conventional weakness with nuclear strength was soon embodied in the policy of "first use" of nuclear weapons, which has remained in effect to this day. The threat of first use under the auspices of the global strike option is indeed the latest incarnation of a policy born at that time.

This compensatory role for nuclear weapons emerged in a new context when, after the protracted, unpopular conventional war in Korea, President Eisenhower adopted the doctrine of nuclear "massive retaliation," intended to prevent limited Communist challenges from ever arising. And it was in reaction to the imbalance between local "peripheral" threats and the world-menacing "massive" nuclear threats designed to contain them that, in the Kennedy years, the pendulum swung back in the direction of conventional arms and a theory of "limited war" to go with them. Meanwhile, nuclear arms were officially assigned the more restricted role of deterring attacks by other nuclear weapons—the posture of "mutual assured destruction."

Today, though the cold war is over, the riddle of the relationship between nuclear and conventional force still vexes official minds. Once again, the United States has assigned itself global ambitions (then it was containing Communism; now it is stopping "terrorism" and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction). Once again, the United States is fighting a limited war—the war in Iraq—and other limited wars are under discussion (against Iran, North Korea, Syria, etc.). And once again nuclear arms appear to offer an all-too-tempting alternative. Arkin comments that a prime virtue of the global strike option in the eyes of the Pentagon is that it requires no "boots on the ground." And Everett Dolman, a professor at the Air Force School at Maxwell Air Force Base, recently commented to the *San Francisco Chronicle* that without space weaponry, "we'd face a Vietnam-style buildup if we wanted to remain a force in the world."

For just as in the 1950s, the boots on the ground are running low. The global New Rome turns out to have exhausted its conventional power holding down just one country, Iraq. But the 2000s are not the 1950s. Eisenhower's overall goal was mainly defensive. He wanted no war, nuclear or conventional, and never came close to ordering a nuclear strike. By contrast, Bush's policy of preventive war is inherently activist and aggressive: The global strike option is not only for deterrence; it is for use.

A clash between the triumphal rhetoric of global domination and the sordid reality of failure in practice lies ahead. The Senate, on the brink of its metaphorical Armageddon, backed down. Would the President, facing defeat of his policies somewhere in the world, do likewise? Or might he actually reach for his nuclear option?

Jonathan Schell is The Nation Institute's Harold Willens Peace Fellow.

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

There's Their Way or the Galloway

So now we have the worst of all worlds: the prospect of some rotten new federal judges and the survival of the filibuster, which the Republicans have consented not to abolish and the Democrats have pledged almost never to use.

As Senator Russ Feingold said, "Democrats should have stood together firmly.... Confirming unacceptable judicial nominations is simply a green light for the Bush Administration."

Since I spent my youth reading fervent denunciations of the filibuster as a tool of Southern reaction, I found it beyond my powers to take the urgent advice of liberals over the past month, shed the prejudices of a lifetime and promote the filibuster to the status of progressivism's stout bulwark.

Besides which, given the collapse of liberalism as the ideological framework for any vigorous advocacy for the better things (war on the palaces, peace to the cottages, etc.), why should we expect Democratic nominees to the federal bench to offer any last-ditch relief? The culture that produced Douglas, Brennan and Black is long gone. Happy "accidents," if they come at all, will come from the right in the shape of libertarians like Souter.

Rather than get drawn into the recent unseemly haggling, it would be a rather more honorable and even realistic approach for the left to attack the whole corrupt system of judicial selection, from top to bottom. What possible justification can there be for a system in which all federal judges are within the gift of state delegations of the Democratic and Republican parties? Let's have popular election of all judges.

The Senate, on the other hand, should abandon its comical pretensions to being a body reflecting any democratic mandate. Senators should be installed by some version of the phone-book approach. Probably the best method was the one obtaining at the former House of Lords, now destroyed by Tony Blair: incumbency by birthright, handed down the generations. Within not too many decades this simple method produced useful numbers of decent, independent-minded people. After Blair's "reforms," the place has become a quango, meaning a creature of the government of the day.

But these are mere dreams. Can there be anything more dismal than what we do have, Democrats in the House and Senate apparently brain-dead? These are times ripe with opportunity. The people largely hold the Republicans in derision and contempt. Bush huddles on the ledge of a 41 percent popular approval rating, heartened only by the fact that the Republican who not long ago towered above him in popular regard, Arnold Schwarzenegger, is perched on a 40 percent rating. The Congressional Republicans' popular standing is somewhere in the 30s.

Day by day the news gets worse for Bush. He plunges into pits of his own making, like the Schiavo case. The economy turns to rubble. He nearly lost his main prop, Laura, to a coalition of the Sons of the Prophet and the Friends of Jonathan Pollard.

Yet there's no sign of a vigorous Democratic onslaught. They surrendered on the nomination of the appalling John Bolton as US ambassador to the UN. Senator Barbara Boxer indicated on May 24 that she's lifting her hold on the nomination. Senator Chris Dodd added the same day that there's no desire for a filibuster. This is the same day that Republican Senator George Voinovich sent out a Dear Colleague letter assailing Bolton and urging all to vote against the man.

So it's scarcely surprising that the testimony of the newly elected independent MP for London's East End, George Galloway, had every person with any snap left in their stride cavorting in jubilant satisfaction. Here at last was a man who could deploy coherent sentences of well-merited, well-structured and richly detailed abuse at the nearest available representative of the Bush Administration. This happened to be Senator Norm Coleman, who doubtless rose that morning without the slightest apprehension that in a few hours a genuine parliamentary roughhouser would give him some whacks on the back of the neck whose bruises won't fade for many a long year.

Another man who rose from his bed presumably no less confident of the shape of the day was Christopher Hitchens, who repaired to the Hill with the plan of garnering himself headlines by confronting Galloway. He tried to do so but ran into witheringly accurate small-arms fire, with Galloway chanting, "You're a drink-soaked former Trotskyist popinjay. Your hands are shaking. You badly need another drink."

This was the biggest thing to happen to popinjays since Hemingway defined one in *Death in the Afternoon* as "a writer who appreciates the seriousness of writing so little that he is anxious to make people see he is formally educated, cultured or well bred." The routed popinjay, plumage adroop, fluttered wanly off to the offices of *The Weekly Standard*, where Murdoch paid him to retaliate with 3,900 distinctly less memorable words, dedicated to showing Galloway to be a shady fellow, using the stock arsenal of "filthy," "mark the sequel" and other familiar popinjabber. At that length, using Hitchens's standards of evidence and innuendo, I reckon I could make a pretty good case for Hitchens being the Armstrong Williams of high-end punditry.

One odd bit in Hitchens's defensive diatribe was a wail about Galloway's "main organizational muscle" being "provided by a depraved sub-Leninist sect called the Socialist Workers party." In a slightly earlier incarnation the SWP was the organizational home port of the drink-soaked former Trotskyist C. Hitchens.

So Galloway showed what a man with fire in his belly can do. The Democrats have no one with that capacity. They have Nancy Pelosi, whose idea of a constructive approach to the Middle East was to tell AIPAC this week, "There are those who contend that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is all about Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. This is absolute nonsense.... In the words of Isaiah, we will make ourselves to Israel 'as hiding places from the winds and shelters from the tempests; as rivers of water in dry places.'" She must have meant arms and cash. Israel already has the water. ■

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KATHA POLLITT

Stiffed

Penises were all over the news as I sat down to write this column. On May 22 faces blushed scarlet in New York State when it came to light that over the past five years Medicaid has handed out free Viagra to 198 sex criminals. Apparently the state thought federal rules required no less. The next day, researchers released a study showing excellent results for Johnson & Johnson's dapoxetine, a drug that prevents premature ejaculation and intensifies the male orgasm. True, rapists' access to taxpayer-funded stiffies vanished within hours, and they will probably have to buy their own dapoxetine too. But you have to admit, men are moving right along, sexually. They have drugs to help them get up and stay in and get out in a shower of sparks, and an array of private and public health plans to pay for these fleshly maneuvers: Last year Medicaid laid out approximately $38 million for impotence drugs; Medicare will start providing them for seniors next year at an estimated cost of nearly $2 billion over the following decade. Even the Defense Department covers them. Need I add that men don't have to worry that their pharmacist will ask to see a marriage license or plug their name into the sex offender registry before handing over those little blue pills?

No, the double standard still waves over the nation's bedrooms. The only new birth control method coming up soon is actually a nostalgia item, the Today sponge, beloved by *Seinfeld*'s Elaine, which will be returning to drugstores later this year. Two decades into the AIDS epidemic, the only woman-controlled means of protection against HIV—now the leading cause of death among black women age 25–34—is the aesthetically repulsive, cumbersome and hard-to-find female condom. Hormone replacement therapy, promoted since the 1950s as the fountain of feminine youth and sexual vitality, looks to be mostly hype, with the possibility of heart attack, stroke and breast or ovarian cancer.

And what about sex aids for women? Where's that female Viagra they're always promising us? Most newspapers didn't even report that in December an FDA panel turned down Procter & Gamble's application for Intrinsa, a testosterone patch intended to raise libido in women whose ovaries have been removed. The problem wasn't that Intrinsa didn't work (the panel voted 14 to 3 that the manufacturers' trials showed a meaningful improvement in desire and pleasure); the issue was health risks as well as the potential for "off-label use" by women who had simply lost their mojo. A "lifestyle drug" for women! Can't have that. Men, of course, have been known to use Viagra recreationally, and Viagra, moreover, is not without risk: It has been associated with fatal heart attacks and eye damage. Here's what gets me, though: FDA panelist Dr. David Hager voted against Intrinsa. Yes, *that* David Hager—the right-wing Christian Ob-Gyn accused of persistent marital rape by his former wife and now under scrutiny for his secret role, first revealed in *The Nation*, in killing over-the-counter status for emergency contraception. Maybe there are enough questions about Intrinsa's safety to justify the turndown—but letting Hager vote on female sex drugs is like letting the Taliban vote on women's hemlines.

It didn't have to be this way. When it first came out, it looked like Viagra was going to be women's best friend. So precipitately did private insurers and government programs rush to cover the magical impotence remedy, the longstanding refusal by many insurers to cover contraception stood out, finally, as indefensibly sexist. (Viagra coverage was justified because impotence makes men depressed—poor Bob Dole! As we all know, fear of pregnancy has no such effect on women.) Pushed by feminist activists, twenty-one state legislatures since 1998 have mandated that private insurers cover birth control the same as other drugs. Even in those states, however, coverage remains spotty, thanks to business-friendly loopholes. And federal coverage is far from perfect: Medicare, which insures not just the elderly but also many young disabled people, does not cover contraception.

The biggest threat to contraception, though, is the right-wing Christians who have put themselves in charge of the nation's wombs. (Viagra is pro-life, the Pill is pro-death—sperm rules!) It's not enough that they call emergency contraception—high doses of certain birth control pills, taken within seventy-two hours of intercourse—a "mini-abortion" (in fact, as I wrote last time, studies by the Population Council show that EC does not work by blocking implantation of a fertilized egg; it prevents ovulation). Now they've persuaded states to shift funds from family planning to "abortion alternatives." For the past two fiscal years and the upcoming one, Missouri has abolished state funding for family planning and boosted programs intended to encourage childbirth. More than 30,000 women who relied on state-funded birth control are now on their own—though if they get pregnant, the state will be happy to kick in some baby clothes or arrange an adoption. Likewise, the Texas legislature has just voted to divert funds from family planning to antichoice "crisis pregnancy" centers, and Minnesota is considering a similar move.

It's all enough to make a girl go on sex strike—at least until Intrinsa gets the OK. After all, as President Bush seemed to be suggesting in a photo-op with babies who had been "adopted" as abandoned embryos, why get hot and bothered when you can be implanted with one of the thousands of leftover embryos languishing in fertility-clinic freezers, and save that clump of cells from certain death in the lab? Yes, thanks to the wonders of reproductive science, if you pay attention in abstinence-only sex ed you too can have a virgin birth.

* * *

Dept. of Corrections: In my last column, I wrote that condoms do not prevent transmission of the human papilloma virus. In fact, condoms do provide some protection against HPV, although not as much as against HIV. I also erred in writing that 70 percent of cervical cancer is caused by HPV; actually, according to Planned Parenthood, HPV is responsible for 93 percent of cervical cancer; the 70 percent figure refers to the percentage caused by the two strains of HPV targeted by the vaccine. ■

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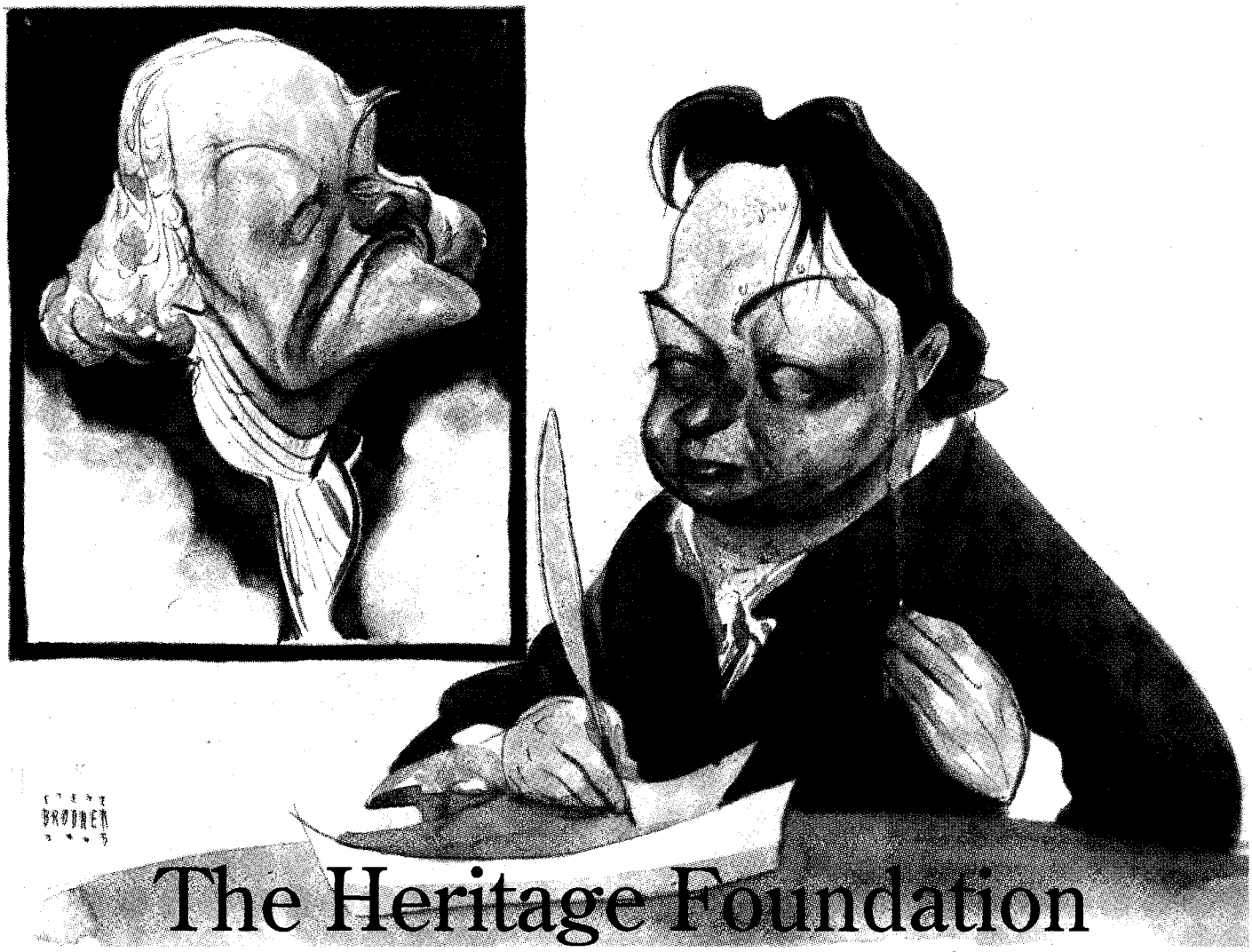
SPRING BOOKS



The Heritage Foundation

DANIEL LAZARE

GEORGE WASHINGTON: The Founding Father.
By Paul Johnson.
HarperCollins. 126 pp. $19.95.

THOMAS JEFFERSON: Author of America.
By Christopher Hitchens.
HarperCollins. 188 pp. $19.95.

James Atlas, the bow-tied editor in charge of HarperCollins's "Eminent Lives" series of short biographies, is not known for his sense of humor, but in publishing Paul Johnson and Christopher Hitchens back to back, he's revealed a mischievous streak that had previously gone unnoticed. Johnson, the *New Statesman* editor turned right-wing author of such bestsellers as *Modern Times* (1983), *A History of the Jews* (1987) and *Intellectuals* (1988), once denounced Hitchens for launching an attack on Mother Teresa that he termed "loathsome and mendacious." Hitchens, the ex-Trotskyist turned supporter of Bush's invasion of Iraq, has attacked Johnson over the years as not only a drunken, wife-beating, racist snob but a drunken, wife-beating, racist snob who, when not assailing the morals of others, has been known to enjoy a good spanking at the hands of his friendly local dominatrix. In short, not the sort of couple you'd expect to find sharing a candle-lit dinner at some quiet bistro. Yet here they are, together at last, with nearly simultaneous bios of two of America's most sainted founders. Not altogether surprisingly, given Hitchens's

Daniel Lazare is the author, most recently, of The Velvet Coup: The Constitution, the Supreme Court, and the Decline of American Democracy *(Verso). He is currently at work on a book about the politics of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.*

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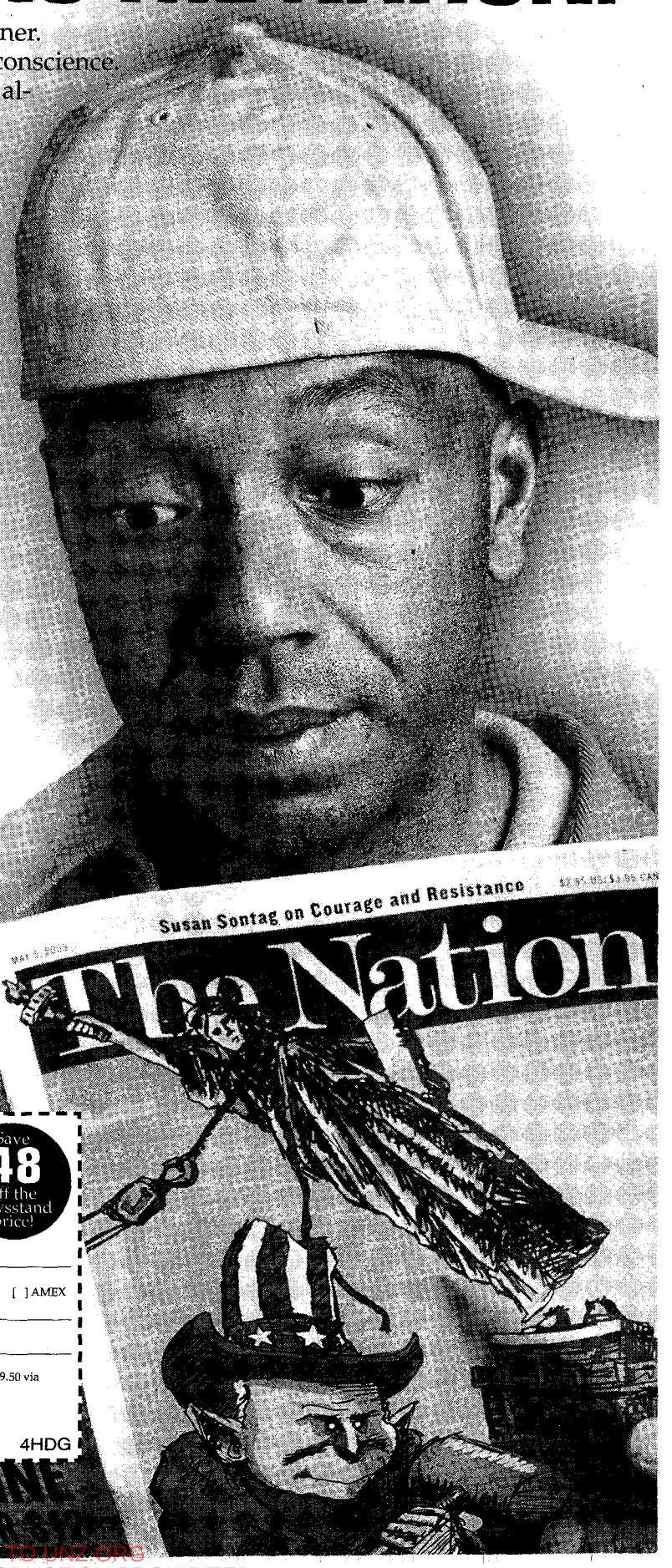

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recent turn to the right, they even end up agreeing on a thing or two, most notably America's role as a beacon of morality in a troubled world.

One cheers America from the right, the other from the center-left. Johnson's book, unquestionably the duller of the two, is pretty much what you'd expect from a writer beloved of Norman Podhoretz, Newt Gingrich and Oliver North—worshipful, patriotic, eager to portray the first President as the ideological forerunner of today's GOP. Washington, Johnson writes, imbued the United States with the sort of sterling-silver principles that have enabled it "to survive a near-fatal Civil War, to become the world's largest economy" and "to take in the poor of the planet and turn them into the richest people in history." The upshot at the dawn of a new millennium is that America is now "set to play the leading part in making the earth secure and democratic." If you approve of one George W., apparently, you must approve of the other; and if you see the invasion of Iraq as anything less than a war for democracy, then you must oppose Washington and everything he stood for. "Washington played, and still plays, a unique role," writes Johnson, "both as founding father and exemplar of moderation and wisdom"—two qualities that opponents of American imperialism apparently lack.

This is absurd, of course, but it is also unfair to Washington, who is less of a plaster saint and therefore more interesting than his biographer makes him out to be. For example, Johnson sneeringly dismisses suggestions that his subject was anything other than exemplary with regard to slavery and race. "Thousands of blacks served under Washington in the war," he states, "and he was deeply impressed by their dogged courage and loyalty, and by the refusal of the great majority to take advantage of British offers to free them if they deserted." Besides begging the question of why musket-toting slaves would not make a break for freedom as soon as they had the opportunity, this statement is seriously misleading. Eventually, Washington did come to appreciate the performance of black soldiers under his command. But he opposed the use of slaves, as Henry Wiencek shows in his monumental 2003 study *An Imperfect God: George Washington, His Slaves, and the Creation of America*, and even tried for a time to bar free blacks from the ranks as well. He also opposed a plan to offer slaves their freedom in return for military service—possibly, Wiencek argues, because he was preparing to sell a group of his own slaves at the time and was worried that such an act might drive down the price.

Johnson writes that Washington clothed his slaves well, "drew the line at hunting fugitive slaves with dogs" and "refused to punish them by whipping except in extreme cases" (whatever that might mean). The truth is once again very different. According to Wiencek—whom Johnson cites in his bibliography but otherwise ignores—"Washington's own records indicate that the slaves were miserably clothed," while those who had merely fallen short in their work were threatened with whippings. As for dogs, Wiencek says, they were employed on at least one occasion in 1773.

Once bitter adversaries, Hitchens and Johnson have finally found something to agree on: America's role as a beacon of morality.

"Washington had no illusions about black slaves," Johnson adds, "whom he thought poor workers except under the closest supervision." Presumably, his slaves had no illusions about their owner, either, who engaged in no productive labor other than supervising his captive workforce.

This is not to say that Washington did not realize slavery was leading to disaster. But given the political economy of which he was a beneficiary, whatever steps he took to deal with the problem were bound to be halting and contradictory. He had to discipline his slaves in order to make a profit, and he had to continually acquire more "livestock," as Johnson calls the human beings under his control, so as to insure his place in the top rungs of Virginia society. At one point, in an apparent effort to show that he is not a complete troglodyte, Johnson chides Washington for failing to see to it that an antislavery provision was incorporated into the Bill of Rights. But the Bill of Rights would never have been ratified if he had. With plantation slaves flocking to British lines, the Revolutionary War left the South more racially polarized than ever before, while the Constitution surrounded slavery with so many legal safeguards as to render it all but impregnable. Washington was nearly as much a prisoner of the slave system as the slaves themselves.

Johnson misses the boat in other ways, too. He describes Washington as someone born to greatness, gushing about his commanding presence, his magnificent physique, graceful dancing abilities, "impeccable English ancestry" and so forth. But what he overlooks is Washington's status as an outsider. He was the product of an intensely provincial society, a bit like Galway, Ireland, or the Outer Hebrides, only many times more remote. This explains his severe self-discipline, his almost masklike reserve and the curious maxims he was continually copying into his notebook as a youth, things like "Kill no vermin, as fleas, lice, ticks etc. in the sight of others" and "Sing not to yourself with a humming noise nor drum with your fingers and feet." A young gentleman coming of age in London or Paris would have had an abundance of real-life models on which to base his behavior. But Washington, growing up 3,000 miles away on the edge of the wilderness, did not, which is why he had to make do with advice books and plays like Addison's *Cato*, the tale of a reluctant Roman general who longs for the simple farming life. They were among the few sources he had for information on how to comport himself, so he made the most of them.

Provincialism was not entirely a weakness, however. As with the Corsican-born Napoleon, growing up on the periphery gave him a certain perspective that others lacked, a better appreciation of the big picture. This is what explains Washington's growing sense of nationalism and the strategic vision that allowed him to turn his enemy's weaknesses to his own advantage. Johnson writes that Washington "fought the war over nine of the thirteen states and got to know large parts of the country with painful intimacy but also with a glowing regard for their potential." True, but it was his sense of their potential that led him to take on the revolutionary command in the first place. Johnson, moreover, gives little idea of the lengths he was prepared to go to in carrying out his ideas. Not only did Washington ally himself throughout the 1790s with Alexander Hamilton, the brilliant young Northern dynamo whose efforts at fostering industrial growth directly threatened the interests of the Southern plantocracy, but when war with Napoleonic France seemed imminent in 1798, he insisted that Hamilton be among those in charge of military defense. This was tantamount to a declaration of war on his fellow landowners. If Bonaparte had invaded, he would most likely have done so via Virginia, where he probably could have counted on a warm welcome from planters who were heavily pro-French. By putting Hamilton in command, Washington was preparing to unleash the slaveholding

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South's *bête noire* on his own state. Johnson describes Washington as a man who united his country but gives no indication that he was also prepared to divide it.

Hitchens is a much more sophisticated political observer, with a juicier topic to boot. Unlike Washington, Jefferson did not shield himself behind an impenetrable visage. He was not the least bit opaque. Rather, he comes across as a clear candidate for the psychiatrist's couch: self-pitying, twitchily neurotic, all but crippled by his gaping psychological wounds. Hitchens tries hard to be fair but continually stumbles across yawning contradictions and outright lies that cause him to throw up his hands in despair. During the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, for instance, he notes that Jefferson tried to insert a paragraph charging George III with first foisting slavery on a reluctant South and then encouraging blacks "to purchase that liberty of which he had deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he also obtruded them." Slavery's real victims, apparently, were not the black people groaning under the lash but the white people applying it. When the paragraph was deleted, Jefferson blamed "Georgia and South Carolina, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves," and then "our northern brethren," who "had very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others." It seems never to have occurred to him that it was cut simply because it was absurd and would have made the Continental Congress a laughingstock.

Similarly, when Daniel Shays led a rebellion by indebted farmers in western Massachusetts in 1786–87, Jefferson was the picture of revolutionary insouciance. "The tree of liberty must from time to time be refreshed with the blood of patriots and tyrants," he offered (the same words, by the way, that Timothy McVeigh had emblazoned on his T-shirt when arrested after the Oklahoma City bombing). But when slaves rose in revolt in Saint-Domingue (now known as Haiti) in 1791, Jefferson was beside himself with fear: "Never was so deep a tragedy presented to the feelings of man.... It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of the Potomac) will have to wade through, & try to avert them." Revolutionary violence was no big deal as long as the revolutionaries in question were white. Laying out his plans years later for the University of Virginia, Jefferson vowed that it would "be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth where it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it." At the same time, Hitchens observes, he made sure that antislavery ideas would be kept at a distance.

One could go on, and indeed Hitchens does for close to 200 pages. His book is a sign of a growing re-evaluation of the Founders that is itself a delayed response to the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and '60s. For years, left-leaning intellectuals have viewed the Revolutionary period through simple-minded populist lenses, with Hamilton as the leader of (hiss! boo!) finance capital and Jefferson as the champion of (hooray!) the common man. But we now know that the only common people Jefferson championed were rural whites, while his ultimate loyalty was to the slaveholding elite. He was a provincial, but rather than rising above it à la Washington, he surrendered to it completely. To quote Hitchens, he was a devotee of "Virginia First" who extolled states' rights, defined democracy in exclusively local terms and disparaged national consolidation as inherently tyrannical.

The only common people Jefferson championed were rural whites, while his ultimate loyalty was to the slaveholding elite.

One of the strengths of Hitchens's book is the balanced view he takes of Hamilton. Although he describes Hamilton as "conservative," a well-nigh meaningless term in this context, he clearly prefers his "mercantile modernism" to Jefferson's reactionary agrarianism. America faced three compelling tasks in the 1790s: It had to strengthen the national government and hence national democracy; it had to do something about what Henry Adams would later call "a cancerous disease of negro slavery"; and it had to modernize the economy. Hamilton was the only one with even a remote idea of how to advance on all three fronts, while Jefferson was an obstacle to each. Jefferson's program would have destroyed the new republic if implemented in full. In fact, it nearly did destroy it when Southern firebrands carried his ideas to their logical conclusion in 1860–65.

"It may still be argued," Hitchens observes, "that Jefferson was a Dixiecrat *avant la lettre*." His 1799 Kentucky Resolution calling on the states to nullify federal laws they considered unconstitutional became "the great political prop of the pro-slavery faction," while his secessionist mutterings in response to a series of domestic improvements proposed by John Quincy Adams in 1826 "helped create the moral basis for the states' rights ideology of John Calhoun." Hitchens gives credit where credit is due. Jefferson took vigorous action to punish the Barbary corsairs of North Africa who had taken Americans prisoner and were holding them for ransom, although he notes that Jefferson was able to do so only because the Federalists had overridden his and James Madison's objections in creating a small but formidable navy in the 1790s. The Louisiana Purchase in 1803 was also a triumph. Yet here, too, Hitchens observes that in devising a rationale for such an unprecedented exercise in federal power, Jefferson, the original strict constructionist, had to resort to the sort of fancy constitutional footwork that he had previously denounced.

It is good of Hitchens to point all this out. Unfortunately, as a recent crossover to the prowar side, he can't resist cozying up to his new friends inside the Beltway or getting in a dig at his former friends on the left. He engages in a bit of Muslim-bashing with regard to the arrogant Yusuf Karamanli, the hostage-taking ruler of the Barbary Coast whose comeuppance at the hands of US forces is celebrated in the opening line of the Marine Corps Hymn ("From the halls of Montezuma to the shores of Tripoli..."). He also engages in de rigueur French-bashing, huffing and puffing that our revolutionaries were so much better than those "fanatical and pitiless Jacobins" who were increasingly influential in Paris after 1789. Where "the French Revolution destroyed itself in Jefferson's own lifetime," he writes, and more "revolutions have destroyed themselves and others" in the years since, the American Revolution "remains the only revolution that still retains any power to inspire."

Somewhere, Hitchens's erstwhile adversary Paul Johnson must be nodding in approval. But the rest of us can only cover our faces in embarrassment. Not only was the American Revolution a popgun in comparison to the thermonuclear bomb that was the French, but—brace yourself, Christopher—the republic to which it gave rise is now viewed as somewhat less than inspiring by roughly 95 percent of the world's population. Among other things, Hitchens's newfound patriotism prevents him from coming to grips

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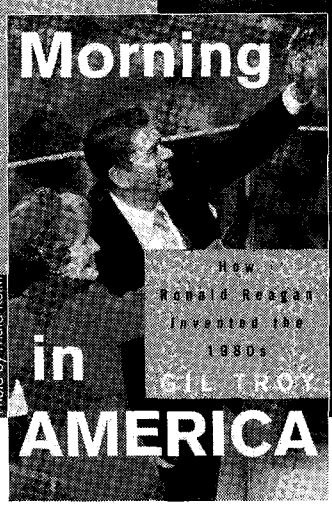
Open for Thought



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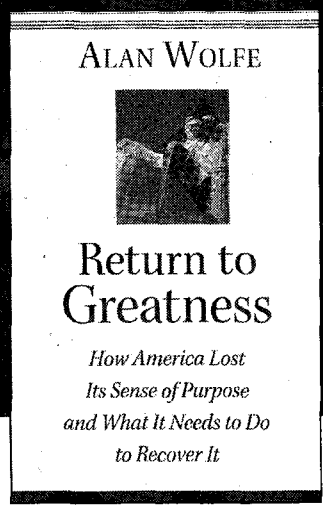

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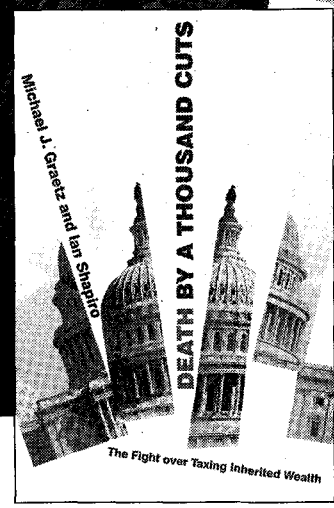

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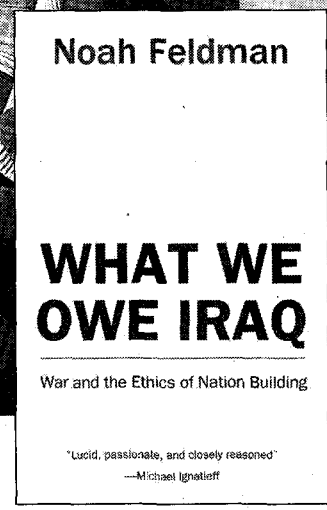
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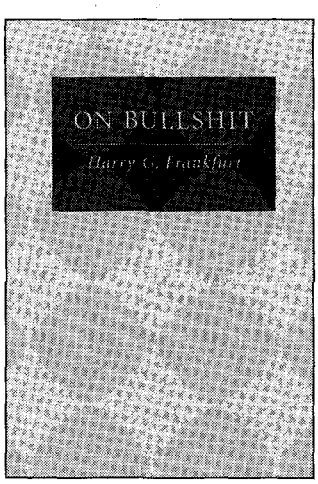

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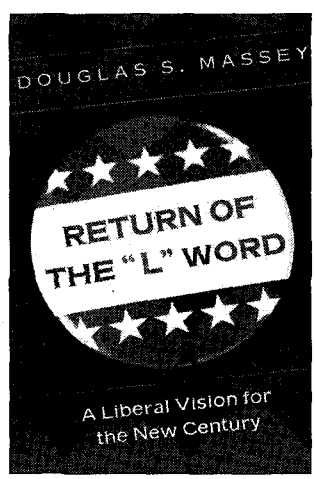

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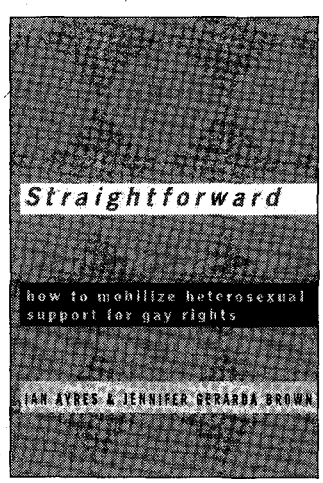

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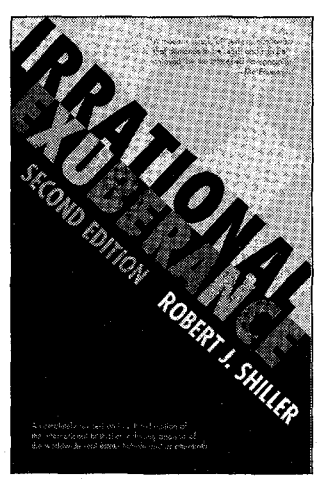

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with his subject's legacy. It is one thing to take Jefferson apart, but quite another to put the pieces back together in such a way as to explain who he was, how he got that way and what his contorted personality means for the nation he did so much to shape. The task is not all that hard. Jefferson's conservatism, his agrarianism and his racism are all things that he passed on to the nation as a whole. So is his enormous capacity for self-pity (something Hitchens touches on repeatedly), his blindness to his own faults, his total incapacity for anything approaching self-criticism, his self-righteousness, his resentment of the world at large. These are qualities that have never been more evident in the United States than in the years since 9/11. If Jefferson truly "designed" or "authored" America, as Hitchens maintains, then the whole world is now wrestling with the results.

This is the point Hitchens could have made. Instead, he abruptly winds up his study with the fatuous statement that Jefferson's "capitulation to a slave power that he half-abominated...is another reminder that history is a tragedy and not a morality tale." History certainly has no shortage of tragic moments. But it is a tragedy as a whole only for the right, which believes that attempts at collective self-amelioration are doomed to failure. For the rest of us, it *is* a morality tale —a complicated one filled with ironies and contradictions, but a morality tale nonetheless. This is why Jefferson's story is so interesting: It offers an object lesson in how not to make one's way through the moral thicket of race, democracy and national development. The old Hitchens could be shallow and lazy, but he wouldn't have ignored the obvious conclusion about Jefferson's troubling political impact. The new Hitchens prefers to maintain a discreet silence. A dose of reality is the last thing the faith-based community in Washington apparently needs. ■

Just My Imagination

TERRY EAGLETON

PICTURE IMPERFECT: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age.
By Russell Jacoby. Columbia. 211 pp. $24.95.

Utopias are not always pleasant places to inhabit. An English fantasy of 1848, Charles Rowcroft's *The Triumph of Woman: A Christmas Story*, portrays a utopian regime full of wholesome puddings and a glorious one person per pew in church. In Sarah Scott's *A Description of Millennium Hall* (1778), the ideal world is an English country mansion in which female midgets play the harpsichord and tend the shrubberies. Douglas Jerrold's *The Chronicles of Clovernook* (1846), an insufferably smug tale in which the narrator becomes particularly excited at the prospect of little boys tearing their trousers, enthuses over an imaginary society that still has taxes, prisons and poverty.

Most utopias, as Russell Jacoby recognizes in his absorbing new study, *Picture Imperfect*, are odorless, antiseptic places, intolerably streamlined and sensible, in which the natives chat for hours about the splendid efficiency of their sanitary arrangements. Alternative social universes tend to be thinly disguised versions of our own—rather as aliens, give or take a limb or two, are seldom all that different from Donald Rumsfeld or Tony Blair. The real aliens are those who are squatting in our laps right now, just as the true utopia must necessarily beggar our speech. To portray the future in the language of the present is inevitably to betray it. "The worst is not," remarks a character in *King Lear*, "so long as we can say, 'This is the worst'"; and what goes for the worst also goes for the best. Anything we can speak of must by definition fall short of the otherness we desire. So perhaps it is better to imagine the future only negatively, as Kant thought that we could catch a glimpse of infinity only by pressing against the limits of the mind and watching them warp and buckle. For his part, Jacoby wants a utopian thought that "pines for the future but does not map it out."

For Theodor Adorno, this negative utopia is known as art. For others, the only true image of the future is the failure of the present. Or, for that matter, the failure of the past. As Walter Benjamin reminded us, it is memories of enslaved ancestors, not dreams of liberated grandchildren, that drive men and women to revolt. To avoid some cheap leftist triumphalism, we must move backward into the future with our eyes fixed mournfully on that great heap of wreckage that is the past. Otherwise we are merely callow modernizers or cavalier avant-gardists, who in seeking to eradicate the past will discover that it returns with a vengeance to plague us.

Yet there are problems with this option, too, which Jacoby does not fully take on board. For one thing, it leaves the left open to a familiar pincers movement on the part of its adversaries. If you can spell out what a radical future would look like, you are the prisoner of a soulless blueprint; if you refuse to do so, you are an idle visionary. Marx sought to elude this double bind by spelling out what would be necessary for constructing a socialist future but not what it would look like once it was in place. You cannot deduce what a thing might look like simply by examining its conditions of possibility.

The Old Testament prophet is not a soothsayer who predicts the future; we can leave soothsaying to those who are hired to peer into the entrails of the political system and assure its rulers that their profits are safe for another fifty years. The prophet's task is not to second-guess the future but to point out that unless we mend our ways, the future will be either remarkably unpleasant or nonexistent. Utopia is not about some impossible perfection—that tedious right-wing charge—but quite the opposite: a social order that tolerates the inevitably partial, finite, defective nature of human affairs. If we perish, it will not be of failure or finitude but of breathless, bright-eyed idealists for whom the sky's the limit. Most of these are known as Americans.

As a Jew, Marx was attentive in his own secularized way to the Mosaic ban on idolatrous images, a ban about which *Picture Imperfect* is particularly illuminating. In fact, the future author of *The Communist Manifesto* began his political career in contention with what one might call "subjunctive" utopian thinkers—the "wouldn't it be nice if" brigade who feel free to dream up ideal schemes because their fantasies never need to face the pressure of reality. We cannot legislate for the future, not least because it is not ours, but the people's, to create. Dreams of the future, as the Frankfurt School

Terry Eagleton, professor of cultural theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester, England, is the author, most recently, of The English Novel: An Introduction.

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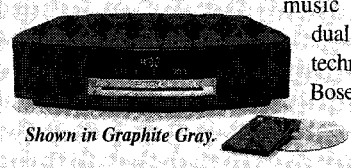
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reminded us, too often confiscate the very political energies that are necessary for their realization.

Yet there is still something to be said for trying to speak the unspeakable. For the fact is that any authentic future must be to some extent in line with the present as well as discontinuous with it. If it is not—if the future is not somehow inherent in the material forces of the present—then it is just wishful thinking, a vacuous, purely gestural kind of politics. An authentic future must be feasible as well as desirable. Otherwise we will persuade men and women to desire uselessly, and so, like the neurotic, to fall ill of longing. In fact, we could claim that utopia is inherent in the present in at least this sense: that without some dim notion of justice, freedom and equality, we would have no standard by which to judge the present, and so would be incapable of identifying its defects. The future is already potentially present in the shape of the blind spots and contradictions of the present—in its silences and exclusions, its conflicts and fragmentations.

We need, then, to steer a path between the blueprinters, who like to think that they have the future in their pockets, and the kind of visionaries for whom nothing definite can be said of an emancipated society (not even, presumably, that it would be pleasant, unoppressive, void of patriarchs and the like). We must strike a balance between saying too much and saying too little, between the future as a mere projection of the present and as a cryptic silence. If there is simply an abyss between the present and the future, then we cannot logically speak of how the future takes shape in the present. Jacoby is right to insist that utopia is by no means incompatible with practical reform, and he ends by stressing the need to link present and future. But his book is by and large an eloquent plea for "poetic" as opposed to blueprinting utopianism; and as such it is, ironically, a touch too definite and unequivocal in its options, too impatient with ambiguity and contradiction. We need to dream, yet risk being distracted and intoxicated by our own fantasies. This is not a contradiction we can easily annul.

Nor is the opposition between the blueprinters and the visionaries as absolute as Jacoby imagines. Like most of us, he is attracted by the kind of utopian thought that sees the future in terms of sensuous luxury rather than Spartan virtue; but he does not see that sensuous fulfillment can be planned for by, say, shortening the working day or other highly practical measures. We must indeed beware of arid blueprints; but the truth is that conservatives dislike utopia because they find the whole idea of social engineering distasteful, in contrast to spontaneous social growth; and leftists need to insist that social engineering can undoubtedly be progressive. Blueprints are not always symptoms of a primly hygienic rationalism. Charles Dickens poked fun at the utilitarian social engineering of his own day, but it did a great deal more for the Victorian poor than his own Romantic spontaneity.

Though we must beware of arid blueprints for a future society, they are not always symptoms of a primly hygienic rationalism.

Jacoby, like almost everyone else on the planet, assumes that the imagination is an entirely positive power, rather than something that can cut both ways. The planning of genocide, for example, involves a fair degree of imagination. He is also rather too inflexible about the distinction between utopia and dystopia (or utopia gone bad). He argues cogently against the prejudice that all "total" or ambitious social change leads directly to totalitarianism and mass murder. On the contrary, as he points out, most of the great dystopian literary works of the modern age are by no means anti-utopian. Orwell's *1984* is not in the least an antisocialist text, as its author was at pains to point out. It is true that some utopian authors were rather less than utopian in their actual lives: Thomas More, who invented the word "utopia," was, we are reminded, a zealous burner of heretics. In general, however, the idea that utopian thought is inevitably totalitarian is a myth.

An emancipated society, Adorno observed, "would by no means be a totality." If Benjamin and Adorno were champions of the fragmentary and unfinished, it was partly because totality in their brand of Judaic thought is reserved for God, who alone has the power to restore a shattered history to wholeness. The grotesque violence of the twentieth century, as Jacoby points out, has ethnic, national, religious and imperialist roots, not utopian ones. Even so, he draws the line between good and bad utopianism a little too stringently. Utopia may not inevitably lead to dystopia, but what else was Stalinism? It is precisely the fact that Stalinism is utopia gone sour that distinguishes it from fascism, whatever those who airily lump the two together as "totalitarian" might suppose.

Picture Imperfect does a useful hatchet job on three robustly anti-utopian Jewish philosophers (Karl Popper, Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt) before turning to a remarkably rich, suggestive excavation of a Jewish, poetic, "iconoclastic" utopian tradition, one that embraces Ernst Bloch and Gustav Landauer, Jacob Talmon and Martin Buber, Fritz Mauthner and Hermann Cohen. If these thinkers are iconoclasts, or image breakers, it is because there can be for them no image of God, and so no sensuous incarnation of freedom and justice. A certain abstract, rationalist quality in Jewish thought (one thinks of Spinoza and Freud) might have some of its roots here. Jewish utopianism involves a crisis of representation, which is one reason why it wells up with such astonishing vigor at the heart of European modernism, which has similar suspicions about image-making.

Max Horkheimer, one of the founders of the Frankfurt School, observed somewhat enigmatically that the school's celebrated critical theory had its source in the biblical injunction "You should make no image of God." It is not for nothing that the great critics of reification and commodity fetishism—Marx, Lukács, Benjamin—were all Jewish. In this strain of thought, Jacoby argues, the eye is trumped by the ear, seeing by listening. The God of Israel is heard but not seen. It is the living word of scripture, not graven idols, that must furnish our guide; and since even scripture can be made into an idol, as fundamentalism so luridly testifies, the written tradition is itself unfinished and enigmatic, finding its completion only in the oral one. It was a part-Jewish philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who warned us of the bewitching, fetishistic power that language could exert over us.

For all its fascination, Jacoby's discussion of Jewish iconoclasm could do with a touch more theology. He might have pointed out, for example, that one reason why Yahweh is not to be imaged is that the only depiction of Him is provided by human beings. It is men and women who are made in His image and likeness. More precisely, it is their freedom that eludes being fixed and frozen in an image, so that idolatry and enslavement are near neighbors. Yahweh is the God of a nomadic tribe who are constantly tempted to settle

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"In our age there is no such thing as 'keeping out of politics.'"
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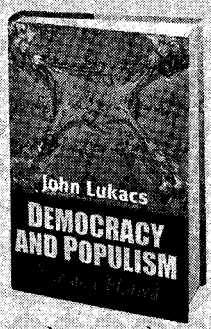

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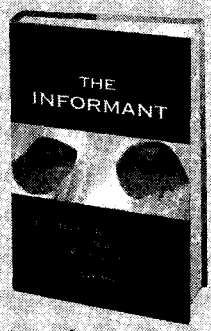

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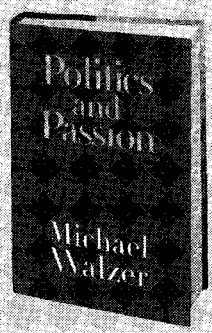

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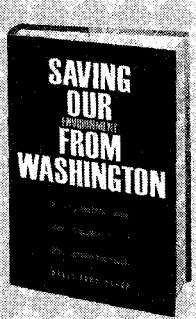

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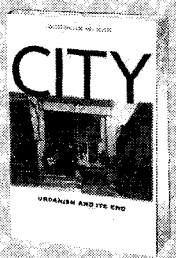

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down with their local crops and idols, and constantly prodded out of such inertia by a God who always goes on before them. Yahweh's famously tautological self-identifying—"I am what I am"—might also be translated as "I shall be what I shall be."

Yahweh is not, of course, God's name, because the Jewish God is nameless. Jacoby sees that this has to do with not representing Him, but he does not seem to grasp the fact that in the Bible God does not have a name, like "Fred" or "cornflakes," because He is not an object or an entity that can be designated. God and the universe do not make two. He is, rather, the source and ground of all possible entities.

Like all of Russell Jacoby's books, *Picture Imperfect* is a timely, passionate, bravely unfashionable intervention. It has, inevitably, a few local errors. The Roman Catholic Church does not "saint" people but canonizes them. Isaiah Berlin is ascribed a leftist past that is news to this reader, and a know-nothing comment of Berlin's on Heidegger is charitably attributed to "humility" rather than to suave donnish malice. One suspects that Jacoby thinks the word "waffle" means prevaricate rather than talk a lot of hot air. Most strikingly of all, Jacques Derrida, the latest figure in a Jewish tradition of negative theology for which the Messiah is always about to arrive but never quite does, passes unmentioned. Almost nothing is said, either, of that great Jewish prophet of the unrepresentable, Sigmund Freud, for whom you cannot make graven images of the unconscious.

Even so, this is a book to be treasured. In retrieving for our troubled times a precious heritage threatened with oblivion, it takes its cue from Walter Benjamin's comment that the image of the past that matters is the one that swims up to us at times of crisis. The future may or may not turn out to be a place of justice and freedom; but it will certainly disprove the conservatives by turning out to be profoundly different from the present. In this sense, it is the hard-nosed pragmatists who behave as though the World Bank and caffe latte will be with us for the next two millennia who are the real dreamers, and those who are open to the as yet unfigurable future who are the true realists. ■

Words Apart

NELL FREUDENBERGER

THE HUNGRY TIDE.
By Amitav Ghosh. Houghton Mifflin. 333 pp. $25.

In 1854 a British meteorologist, Henry Piddington, warned the colonial government of India that its plans to build a new port south of Calcutta were doomed. Piddington knew that the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans, an archipelago of tiny, muddy islands at the mouth of the Matla River, protected the Bengali coastline from storms. This unique environment—today, one of the last habitats of the Royal Bengal tiger and the Asian river dolphin—is the setting of Amitav Ghosh's new novel, *The Hungry Tide*, a contemporary story with deep historical roots. Piddington appears as a minor character, writing a frantic letter to the viceroy: "There would come a day when a great mass of salt water would rise up in the midst of a cyclone and drown the whole settlement." Piddington was ignored, and five years after its completion, the new port, which was to be a peer of Bombay, Singapore and Hong Kong, was destroyed by a tsunami.

Unlike weathermen, novelists are not in the business of making predictions. Even so, *The Hungry Tide*, which describes a fictional contemporary tsunami in the Indian Ocean—and was completed before the recent disaster there—seems eerily prescient. Ghosh, who has a doctorate in social anthropology, seems to approach his novels like research projects—a contentious strategy today, as some writers proclaim their freedom from the library, while others emphasize the trouble they have taken to procure the facts. In this case, the author's investigations feel organic to the story because of his deep involvement, both personal and political, with the place he's writing about. (Ghosh has family connections to the Sundarbans, and has recently joined the protests against a resort development there.) The islands represent a small part of his rich literary territory: the extraordinary confluence of language, culture and religion at the nexus of India, Bangladesh and Burma. In his previous novels, especially *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh has explored the devastating effects of colonialism in this part of the world, and *The Hungry Tide* continues the project, drawing a brilliant analogy between the unique ecology of the Sundarbans and their violent history. In the novel as in life, the Sundarbans remain one of the few places on earth where humans and nature are equally matched.

The Hungry Tide begins simply, with a man and a woman on a train. Kanai Dutt, a translator who runs a successful corporate interpretation service in New Delhi, notices Piyali Roy, a young American scientist of Indian parentage who has come to the Sundarbans to study the rare Asian river dolphin. She spills her tea on him; he invites her to visit him and his aunt on an island called Lusibari. It's easy to set up an attraction in fiction but difficult to maintain it, and at this point Ghosh sensibly diverts his two main characters for more than a hundred pages. Piya meets Fokir, a crab fisherman whose work turns out to have an almost perfect symmetry with her own, and hires him as a guide to the waterways of the tide country. Meanwhile, on Lusibari, Kanai's aunt introduces him to Fokir's wife, Moyna, an ambitious nursing student. Less a triangle than a love square, the relationships between Kanai, Piya, Fokir and Moyna over the course of the novel allow Ghosh to explore deep questions about language, class and the nature of home.

Kanai, a bachelor who is "rarely single," prides himself on his ability to spot an attractive woman in a crowd. Although language is "both his livelihood and his addiction," his passion for it is decidedly secondary. Interestingly, in Ghosh's fiction etymological expertise is not an especially admirable trait. Kanai's recognition of Piya's American accent is the inverse of a moment in Ghosh's 1995 novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, when a nineteenth-century British colonial linguist attempts to seduce a servant by identifying his dialect: "'Can't fool me,' he says. 'I've got you natives figured: I know exactly where every single one of you belongs. Those loan words will give you away every time.'" The insult of the unwanted advance is compounded by the fact that the word that has

Nell Freudenberger, the author of Lucky Girls *(Ecco), a collection of stories, is currently at work on a novel.*

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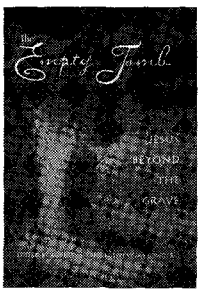

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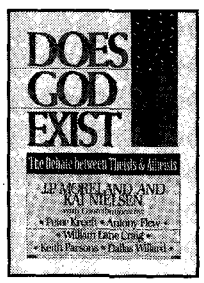

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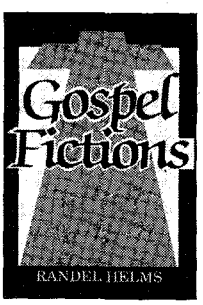

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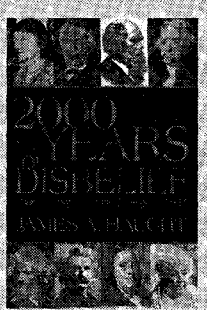

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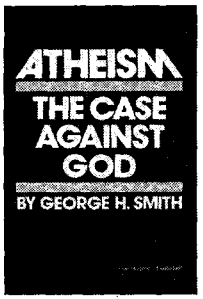

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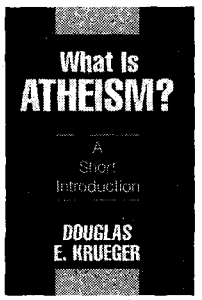

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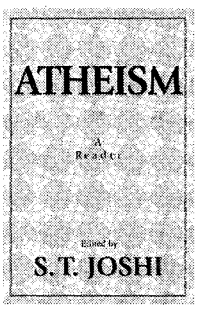

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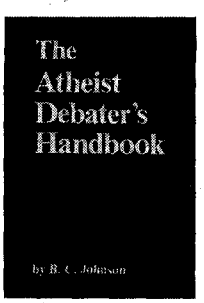

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given the servant away is a loan word, borrowed from English. Ghosh is eloquent about the unique problems of language on the subcontinent, where the Sanskritization of colonial place names has made it possible to "forget" even the name of one's birthplace. Piya notices that Kanai says "Calcutta" rather than "Kolkata." He explains: "I try to reserve 'Calcutta' for the past and 'Kolkata' for the present, but occasionally I slip. Especially when I'm speaking English."

Ghosh is interested in the history of languages, and how they contribute to the formation of individual character. Although Piya's parents spoke Bengali to each other, she didn't learn it; as with many children of immigrants, she's not sure she wants the baggage her parents' language contains. Appropriately for a scientist, she prefers "words with the heft of stainless steel, sounds that had been boiled clean, like a surgeon's instruments, tools with nothing attached except meanings that could be looked up in a dictionary." Bengali, however, resides in Piya's brain as a kind of fossil, and the sound of the language triggers memories of her childhood. In linguistic terms, Kanai's aunt Nilima is Piya's opposite:

> Her Bengali, after years of living in the tide country, had almost converged with the local dialect, having been stripped of the inflections of her urban upbringing. But her English, possibly because she spoke it so rarely, had survived like a fern suspended in amber, untouched by time and unspoiled by the rigors of regular usage, a perfect specimen of a tongue learned in the schools of the Raj.

The alternative to these verbal "specimens" in the novel is science, which can be conducted without language. Piya and Fokir can't speak a word to each other, and yet they discover that the crab line Fokir uses, with its evenly spaced morsels of bait, allows Piya to take regular depth measurements of the river. Those measurements prompt a significant discovery about the river dolphins' behavior. Piya and Fokir's professional sympathy gives way to an attraction that transcends the boundaries of language and class, and it's a testament to Ghosh's skill that he pulls it off. Of course, it's hard to resist a guy who saves you twice from drowning: "His face rested on the back of her neck and she could feel his stubble on her skin. Soon her lungs adapted to the rhythm of his diaphragm as it pumped in and out of the declivity of her lower back. Everywhere their bodies met, their skin was joined by a thin membrane of sweat." Lungs, diaphragms, declivities and membranes—body parts reminiscent more of the laboratory than a love scene—are peculiarly appropriate for this couple; it is as if, without words, Piya and Fokir are forced to fall back on more primal stuff.

Kanai, who likes to boast that he has "loved...in six languages," is a little baffled by his attraction to Piya—a woman whose greatest joy is standing silently for hours on a boat, scanning the river for creatures that look to him like "little floating pigs." When he notices her interest in Fokir, he angrily tries to disillusion her: Anything she thinks she has in common with an illiterate fisherman is a foolish fantasy. Ghosh, however, seems to give the scientist the last word: "For if you compared it to the ways in which dolphins' echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being." The same could be said of writing novels, of course.

In Ghosh's novel, language is a medium of power, and the translator's role is not so much to facilitate communication as to inhibit it.

Ghosh's skepticism about language raises a question about fiction, especially fiction that purports to speak for the dispossessed. In *The Glass Palace*, he dramatized the massive (and largely forgotten) exodus of refugees from Burma to India during World War II. Here, he tells a similar story while maintaining a distance from the refugees themselves. Kanai's Uncle Nirmal, a frustrated Marxist writer, witnessed the struggle between the Bengali refugees who settled the tide country island of Morichjhāpi and West Bengal's Left Front government, which violently evicted them. Kanai reads about the incident in a notebook his uncle left for him. For Nirmal, the refugees are political nobility, and their settlement on Morichjhāpi represents a kind of utopia.

Nirmal's notebook is laced with quotations from Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, for which the old writer has an almost religious reverence; the elegies gracefully mirror the novel's themes of inspiration and the natural world. The animals, Nirmal quotes, "*already know by instinct/we're not comfortably at home/in our translated world.*" Although Nirmal hasn't accomplished the writing projects he dreamed of as a young man, he hopes that by passing the refugees' story on to his successful, urban nephew, it will somehow reach the rest of the world: "*I feel certain you will have a greater claim to the world's ear than I ever had.*" The notebook is written in English, but it isn't in publishable form; in order to pass the story on, Kanai would have to find a way to retell it. Essentially, his uncle is asking him to go back to his first love, translation, and Kanai isn't sure he's up to the task.

Kanai's interest in Piya inspires him to take on a simpler sort of translation: He asks to go along on her survey of the river dolphins, offering to interpret for her and Fokir. Moyna is less than thrilled with the prospect, and she begs Kanai to keep an eye on them: "There's no one else who knows how to speak to both of them—to her and to him. It's you who stands between them." In this situation, the translator's role is not so much to facilitate communication as to inhibit it, and as Ghosh implies, Kanai has the opportunity to obstruct more than he helps. Kanai surprises us, however. The last thing he translates for Piya is a song she's heard Fokir singing. He gives her the translation in writing, along with a caveat: "Such flaws as there are in my rendition of it I do not regret, for perhaps they will prevent me from fading from sight, as a good translator should." If the novelist is a kind of translator of the world, then he is most visible in his mistakes. As long as he writes honestly, the reader takes his creation for the real thing; the best the author can hope for is to become invisible.

Amitav Ghosh grew up in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and in his family alone he seems to have enough stories for an army of writers. It was his father who inspired the most memorable character in *The Glass Palace*, a terribly conflicted soldier in the British colonial army; and his uncle, formerly the headmaster of a school in the Sundarbans, introduced him to the tide country. Fictionalizing these stories comes with an enormous responsibility, however: to render them in a way that the English-speaking world can understand. Ghosh has pointed out that there is only one published English account of the refugees' experiment in Morichjhāpi (and, at least for the moment, the "world's ear" still listens in English). Flaws in Ghosh's "translation" of this world would do more

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than mar a piece of art; they would distort history.

The Hungry Tide is on the surface concerned with the violence of nature, with cyclones and tiger attacks. Like Bengal, however, the Sundarbans are divided down the middle: Some of the islands belong to India, while others are technically in Bangladesh. And the environmental disturbances in the novel suggest the historically volatile political climate on the islands. As Moyna tells Kanai: "When the wind blows on the water, you see ripples and waves, but the real river lies beneath, unseen and unheard. You can't blow on the water's surface from below, Kanai-Babu. Only someone who's outside can do that." Like Ghosh, Kanai is both a stranger and a family member in the Sundarbans. A part of him would like to stay and help the islanders, while another is eager to return to his cosmopolitan life in New Delhi. Through Kanai, Ghosh subtly explores the complex relationship between the country's well-off, urban minority and its much larger and poorer rural population.

Despite Ghosh's distrust of language as a medium of power, his prose has a dazzling intellectual clarity, whether he's describing the elegance of a scientific hypothesis or the vision of a utopian society for the dispossessed. Piya and Kanai, as well as more peripheral characters like Nirmal and Moyna, touch us through interior monologues on the ideas that matter to them: science, politics and the art of translation. When these characters are actually speaking to one another, however, they can sound stilted, as if their author's suspicion of language as an effective means of communication extends to his characters' dialogue:

> "Is this the first time you've come, then?" said Piya.
>
> "No, it's not," said Kanai. "I was sent down here once, years ago."
>
> "Sent down? Why?"
>
> "It's a story that involves the word 'rusticate,'" said Kanai with a smile. "Are you familiar with it?"
>
> "No. Can't say I am."

It's hard to imagine a contemporary young woman from Seattle, no matter how independent and isolated by her profession, using the folksy expression "Can't say I am." Nor do even professional translators introduce their childhood stories by defining words. Ghosh occasionally seems so intent on establishing his characters' obsessions that he won't permit them to surprise us. At the end of the novel, when the cyclone we've been waiting for finally hits, Piya and Fokir are stranded in a tree: "Piya knew from the pressure in her lungs that the water above them was at least nine feet deep"—an observation that strikes the reader as a little too lucid under the circumstances, even for a veteran marine biologist. (Describing another near-drowning, Ghosh is much more convincing, showing the disorientation of going under in one of the tide country's heavily silted rivers.) This tendency to be overly neat is most jarring in the book's epilogue, where Ghosh can't help tying up every loose end. The dead are memorialized, the characters are reunited and Kanai's wonderfully prickly Aunt Nilima offers a final observation worthy of Walt Disney. Still, the novel's penultimate section is beautiful; I wish it had ended there.

On the night before the storm, Piya and Fokir observe a strange moon: "It was almost perfectly spherical, except for a thin shaving missing on one side. Around it was a halo with a faint copper tint." Ghosh's disturbingly vivid description of the storm that follows makes it hard to believe he wrote the novel before last December's pictures and news

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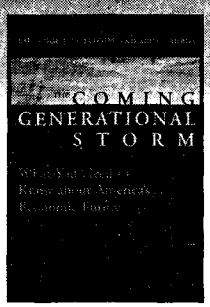

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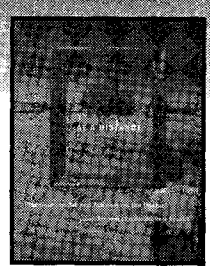

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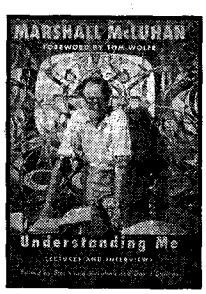

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reports. Piya uses the very phrase—the "wall of water"—the tsunami's survivors did in telling their stories: She "glimpsed something that looked like a wall, hurtling toward them from downriver. It was as if a city block had suddenly begun to move: the river was like pavement lying at its feet, while its crest reared high above, dwarfing the tallest trees." In 1867 the meteorologist Piddington was vindicated by the fulfillment of his prophecy; I expect the same is not true for Ghosh. What is extraordinary about this novel is not its timeliness but the author's ability to see an environment from several conflicted points of view—the scientist's, the fisherman's, the historian's—without favoring any of them. A landscape can give a writer great gifts; maybe this multifaceted perspective is something the best novels can give back to the places that inspired them. ■

Unintended Consequences

ADAM HASLETT

BECOMING JUSTICE BLACKMUN: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court Journey.
By Linda Greenhouse. Times Books. 268 pp. $25.

In the spring of 1970 Richard Nixon was having trouble filling a vacancy on the Supreme Court. His first two choices, both Southern conservatives, had been voted down in the Senate. Smarting from these defeats, the Administration turned to an old childhood friend of Chief Justice Warren Burger, whom Nixon had appointed a year earlier. He was a 61-year-old Midwesterner named Harry Blackmun. Assistant Attorney General William Rehnquist had vetted Blackmun's record as an appellate judge and found him to be "conservative-to-moderate in both criminal law and civil rights." In April Nixon met with his third-choice candidate in the Oval Office.

Among Blackmun's papers, from which Linda Greenhouse has crafted her highly readable story of his career on the Supreme Court, there is a dictation he made to his file about the meeting. As the interview ended, Blackmun recounts, Nixon "took my arm...and led me to the window overlooking the Rose Garden. He said, Judge, when you come down here, you will be completely independent. That is the way it should be."

It is difficult to imagine that at the time either man foresaw just how accurate the President's words would turn out to be. The fact was, a Republican President, preparing to run against legalization of abortion in his re-election campaign, had just nominated a man who less than three years later would write the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and who over the course of the next two decades would become the most liberal voice on the Supreme Court. As the country prepares for what promises to be a major battle to fill the seat that Chief Justice Rehnquist is expected to retire from later this year, Greenhouse, who has covered the Supreme Court for the *New York Times* since 1978, has given us a very timely account of how this transformation took place and of how a Justice who was at first suspicious of feminism became an ardent defender of gender equality and women's rights.

Upon his retirement in 1994, Blackmun, who it turns out was quite a pack rat, arranged for all 1,585 boxes of his papers—from childhood diaries to draft opinions to notes passed down the bench from other Justices—to be donated to the Library of Congress and opened to the public five years after his death, which came in 1999. Anticipating intense interest in the abortion cases in particular, the Blackmun family gave Greenhouse a two-month head start in the archive. The result was a series of three feature articles that ran in the *Times* last year covering *Roe* and its legacy, Blackmun's evolving view of the constitutional status of the death penalty and, finally, the story of his lifelong friendship with Chief Justice Burger. *Becoming Justice Blackmun* is essentially a book-length treatment of these same three subjects, and thus, as its author readily admits, is neither a full biography nor a complete account of a judicial career. (Friends and foes of Blackmun, have no fear; such tomes are well under way.)

In many ways, the most narratively compelling portion of the book takes place before Blackmun even reaches the Court. In the same lucid, economical prose that distinguishes her reporting in the *Times*, Greenhouse tells the story of Blackmun's upbringing in a modest household in St. Paul and his career in private practice. Surprisingly enough, what emerges is a portrait of a cautious man, held back at times by financial worries and hesitant at nearly every step to take risks. There is little indication of the person who would eventually disagree so starkly and repeatedly with his old childhood friend Burger, who grew up in the same moderate Republican climate of opinion that Blackmun did.

After attending the same kindergarten, the two went to different schools but remained close friends throughout adolescence and young adulthood. While Burger stayed in Minnesota for college and law school, Blackmun won a scholarship to Harvard College and went on to Harvard Law School. Upon returning to Minnesota during the early years of the Depression, he found his father's business failing and had to lend him money from his law clerk's salary.

"I will hand it over," he said in his diary, of the $300 his father requested in 1933, "but it wrecks my own plans...and absolutely upsets any plans that I may ever have had of getting married." This was overstatement, but the young Blackmun, influenced by the economic times, his family's circumstances and perhaps his mother's depression, took a consistently cautious view of his own prospects, turning down an offer in the Roosevelt Labor Department just as the New Deal was getting under way and remaining in a lower-paid position at a Minneapolis firm in order to build up financial security. Indeed, he waited nearly a decade, until after he had made partner, to marry. In 1949 he began a nine-year stint as chief counsel at the Mayo Clinic, a period he later described as the happiest of his professional life.

Burger, meanwhile, long active in Republican circles, moved to Washington in 1953 to join Eisenhower's Justice Department, and three years later he was appointed to the US Court of Appeals for the Washington, DC, Circuit, often a stepping stone to the Supreme Court. Describing them as "phonies" and "mediocrities," Burger complained in letters to Blackmun about the Justices then on the highest Court, who, under Earl Warren's

Adam Haslett, a graduate of Yale Law School, is the author of a collection of short stories, You Are Not a Stranger Here *(Anchor), and a recent recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in fiction.*

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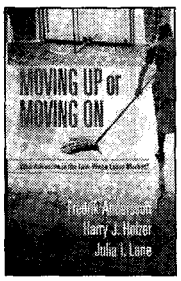

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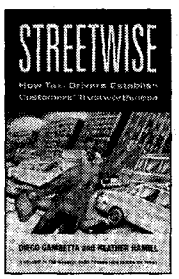

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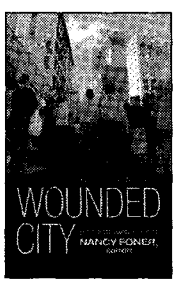

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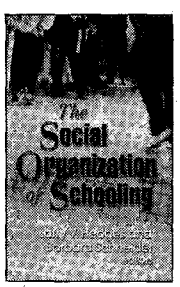

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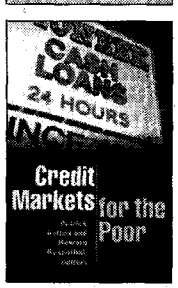

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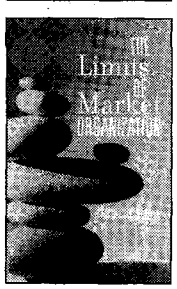

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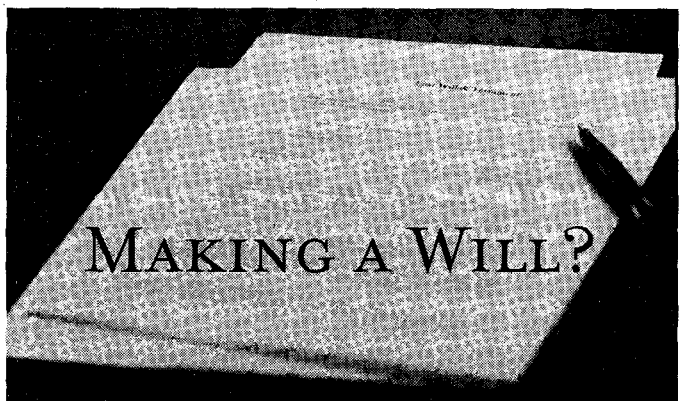

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leadership, were handing down one landmark decision after another strengthening the rights of the accused against state prosecutors. Always more politically ambitious than Blackmun, Burger worked hard to position himself for a Supreme Court nomination, finally succeeding in 1969.

After Blackmun's own appointment in 1970, his mother warned him that his relationship with Burger would inevitably change. "Mother, it just can't," he recalls saying. "We've been friends for a long time."

"Well, you wait and see," she told him.

In his first several terms, he voted with the Chief Justice so consistently that they were dubbed "the Minnesota Twins," much to Blackmun's irritation. Liberals on the Court like Thurgood Marshall, William O. Douglas and William Brennan viewed him as another foot soldier in Nixon's campaign to reverse the march of the Warren Court. When he dissented, along with Burger, in the Pentagon Papers case, arguing against the *New York Times*'s right to publish the McNamara archive, a postcard from Minneapolis arrived: "The 2 Nixon appointees from Dayton Bluff Elem. School jump thru the hoop like 2 trained poodles."

The two men would vote on the same side of another landmark opinion, though this time not in line with the policies of the man who had appointed them. In September 1971, facing health problems, Justices Hugo Black and John Harlan both resigned, leaving the Court at seven. Two abortion cases had already been accepted for argument later that fall. At the conference after oral arguments, a tentative majority of the diminished Court emerged to strike down both the Texas law challenged in *Roe v. Wade*, which allowed for abortion only to save the life of the mother, and the Georgia law challenged in *Doe v. Bolton*, which had a broader range of exceptions. Burger and Blackmun, both of whom agreed that the Texas law was unconstitutional, thought the Georgia law might stand. Essentially breaking Court protocol, Burger assigned both opinions to Blackmun, though the Chief appeared to be in the majority in only one of them. (By tradition, if the Chief is in the majority, he assigns the opinion; when he is in dissent, the senior Associate Justice in the majority does the assigning.)

Greenhouse suggests that in doing this Burger was relying on Blackmun to produce a narrow, perhaps even technical decision, which might avoid the issue of a constitutional right to abortion and cause the least controversy. Blackmun, always a slow writer, took until May to circulate a draft. By then, however, his initial impressions had changed, and he favored striking both the Texas and Georgia laws. (He had concluded that the right to abortion fell within the larger right to privacy that had been established in two earlier cases involving laws banning the use and sale of contraceptives.) At this stage of the proceedings, *Doe v. Bolton* was still the lead opinion, in which he set forth the proposition that the choice to have an abortion was "within the scope of personal rights protected by the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments." His first draft of *Roe* focused on a jurisdictional issue and barely mentioned the right to abortion. Given the mixed response to his first effort by the other Justices—many found it poorly reasoned and insufficiently rooted in existing constitutional doctrine—and the approaching end of the term, Blackmun asked that the cases be held over for reargument. The suggestion faced stiff opposition from Douglas; if the cases were reargued, Nixon's new appointees—Lewis Powell and Rehnquist—would have a vote, and he feared the decisions would go the other way. Douglas also doubted Blackmun's

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commitment to the outcome and worried that he might change his mind over the summer. About the latter, Douglas couldn't have been more wrong. The delay only deepened and strengthened Blackmun's commitment to his position.

While much of this history has been told before, notably in Bob Woodward and Scott Armstrong's 1979 court classic *The Brethren* (which is being reissued this summer to coincide with public interest in the coming confirmation battle), what Greenhouse has given us through a study of Blackmun's papers is a fuller sense of his thought as it developed. During the summer recess before reargument, he returned to the Mayo Clinic library and did extensive research on the history of abortion regulation, learning, apparently for the first time, that most state laws dated only to the mid- to late nineteenth century. Most interesting, perhaps, is an article Greenhouse found in Blackmun's Mayo Clinic research file: a *Washington Post* column written by pollster George Gallup titled "Abortion Seen Up to Woman, Doctor." The piece began with the line, "Two out of three Americans think abortion should be a matter for decision solely between a woman and her physician."

Forests have been felled to print all the jeremiads on *Roe* as an arrogant, elitist assertion of what Byron White in his dissent called "raw judicial power," most of these relying on the evidence that thirty-seven states banned abortion at the time. And in what has since become the standard center-liberal line of attack, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, before going on the Court, criticized the decision for removing the controversy from the political process at an inopportunely early point in the national debate. A criticism less often leveled is that the opinion's author may in fact have been spurred on by that other famously antidemocratic element—public sentiment, i.e., a solid majority at the very time the decision was handed down, favoring a woman's right to choose.

The Supreme Court's role is obviously not to translate public opinion into legal doctrine. As a matter of design, it's the branch of government that faces what the legal scholar John Hart Ely called "the counter-majoritarian difficulty," one of whose facets is the protection of minority rights against a hostile public. And yet, in an era when we have what amounts to a counter-majoritarian legislature in the form of a Senate whose Republican majority represents fewer citizens than the Democratic opposition, it's not immediately obvious that the federal judiciary is in fact our least representative branch. When well-funded intensity of preference writes the legislation and prevails over less-organized but nonetheless majority sentiment on everything from tax cuts to environmental policy, those in need of protection in the political process may no longer be the "discreet and insular minorities" the Supreme Court famously identified as requiring it but the diffuse majorities whom geography and the Electoral College have demoted to onlookers in the procession of their own national life. The awkward fact for antiabortion groups was and remains that in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court and a majority of the citizenry were more or less in agreement.

We'll never know with certainty what place such public sentiment had in Harry Blackmun's thinking, or that of the six Justices who joined his opinion, but Blackmun's own experience clearly played a role. For one, at the Mayo Clinic he had been counsel to doctors, who were the legally culpable parties under the criminal statutes. He was also the father of a young woman who several years earlier had become pregnant at 19 (something Woodward and Armstrong either did not know or chose not to mention). Rather than have an abortion, she dropped out of col-

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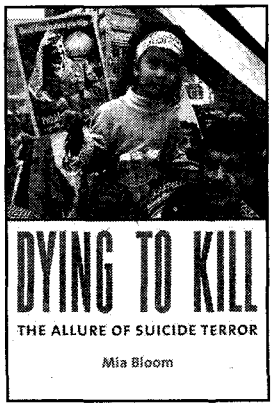

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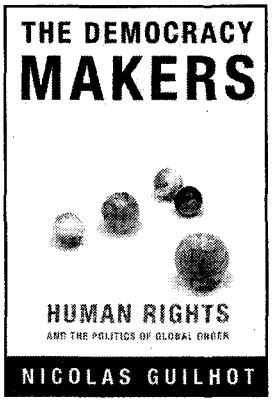

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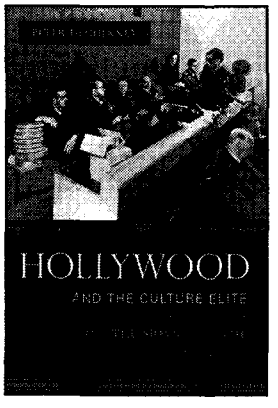

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Peter Decherney

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lege and married her boyfriend, only to end up miscarrying several months later and eventually divorcing her husband. In the far more detailed and historically grounded draft of *Roe* that emerged in the fall of 1972, Blackmun began his opinion by acknowledging "our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy." Among those things that he recognizes might influence a person's view, along with religion and philosophy, is "one's exposure to the raw edges of human existence." One imagines that his daughter's experience was just such an exposure for Blackmun.

As it turned out, Nixon's new appointee Powell, a lawyer from the conservative establishment of Virginia, was also aware of such raw edges. His father-in-law and both of his brothers-in-law were obstetricians. As Woodward and Armstrong put it, "Powell had heard all the horrifying stories of unsanitary butchers and coat-hanger abortions." Much to his colleagues' surprise, he joined Blackmun's opinion.

By early January 1973, a final draft encompassing the suggestions of other Justices was complete. White and Rehnquist had written their dissents. The only person preventing the decision from being handed down was Chief Justice Burger. He would join the opinion, but said he hadn't yet decided if he would write a separate concurrence. Several Justices, including Blackmun, suspected his delay was intentional. Burger was scheduled to administer Nixon's second oath of office, and preferred not to arrive onstage as the Chief who had just signed off on the legalization of abortion. In his eventual three-paragraph concurrence, he wrote, "Plainly, the Court today rejects any claim that the Constitution requires abortion on demand," parroting the exact phrase Nixon had used in his campaign. Two days after the inauguration, on January 22, Blackmun read his summary of *Roe v. Wade* from the bench. The news of Lyndon Johnson's death that same day drowned out the story in the next day's papers. News traveled nonetheless. Later that same week Blackmun flew to a speaking engagement in Iowa. He was met by several dozen antiabortion protesters. As Greenhouse aptly puts it, "The rest of Harry Blackmun's life had begun."

Given the way Greenhouse describes Burger and Blackmun's friendship before they joined the Court—particularly her discussion of the sometimes tortured letters and notes Burger sent back to Minneapolis, hinting at his bleak state of mind—it's tempting to imagine the generally pompous Chief Justice as Henry II and Blackmun as his Thomas à Becket, a lifetime friend appointed to power who turns out to be the thorn of conscience in the king's side. Clearly Burger was involved in getting his old friend nominated in the wake of Nixon's two failures in the Senate. He wanted an ally to help execute the plans he had for a the post-Warren era on the Court.

One of the consequences, however, of Greenhouse's purposefully limited approach (she relied almost solely on Blackmun's archive, choosing not to interview family or former clerks) is that once the two men are together in the same building and their personal, written correspondence dwindles, the story line drifts, quite literally, into the margins. We are told that on one of Burger's drafts concerning involuntary commitment to mental institutions, Blackmun scrawled caustically, "The expert in psych!" and graded the opinion a "C-minus." Elsewhere, the attitudes of Blackmun's clerks, as evidenced by notes to their boss, are used to indicate the diminishing respect he had for his old friend. "The Chief's opinion has come round," one writes. "Like the Bourbons, he forgets nothing and learns nothing." But in the clubbish confines of the Supreme Court, where each case may require a new alliance, no henchmen are sent to rough up the troublesome friend gone too liberal. A surface peace prevails.

Justice Blackmun's exposure to what he called 'the raw edges of human existence' may well have shaped his convictions on abortion.

But Blackmun did become a liberal, defying not only his old friend's expectations but quite possibly his own. Like the more recent case of Justice David Souter, Blackmun began in one camp and ended up in another. Voting with Burger in 87 percent of cases handed down in his first five years on the Court, by his last five Blackmun voted with Brennan and Marshall well over 90 percent of the time. While one can partly account for this by noting that the Court became steadily more conservative around him, a shift in voting pattern this dramatic indicates that by the time Blackmun reached his mid-70s and 80s, his view of the legal landscape had fundamentally altered. For one thing, *Roe* came under increasing attack in the Reagan years. Greenhouse describes the ever more tenuous alliances that protected the decision from being overruled, as well as the growing bitterness voiced on both sides of the debate within the Court. While she never makes this argument explicitly, the totality of the evidence she presents suggests that at least part of Blackmun's transformation came as a result of feeling personally identified with (and blamed for) his earlier decision. Blackmun had a reputation for being rather thin-skinned and sensitive to criticism, a point Woodward and Armstrong are more explicit about than Greenhouse. Reading the two books together, however, one can begin to piece together the way Blackmun's shift leftward is also, in an odd sense, his digging in his heels. When Sandra Day O'Connor dissented from the Court's striking down of Pennsylvania's "informed consent" provisions in 1985, Blackmun discounted her arguments, noting on her draft: "She is just against abortion."

In *Roe*, Blackmun had based his argument on the right of the physician to make a medical decision free of state interference. He declined to adopt as his central premise the feminist argument that abortion is anchored in a woman's right to personal autonomy. The more forcefully *Roe* was attacked, however, the closer Blackmun drew to the feminist line of reasoning. In 1992 came *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, in which it seemed the conservatives finally had the votes to overturn *Roe*. But Justices Souter, O'Connor and Kennedy were unwilling to go that far. While dispensing with the trimester system and the fundamentality of the constitutional right to abortion, they joined the liberal wing of the Court to uphold the basic premise that states could not outlaw the practice.

In a separate opinion, and in striking contrast to his earlier logic, Blackmun wrote, "By restricting the right to terminate pregnancies, the State conscripts women's bodies into its service, forcing women to continue their pregnancies, suffer the pains of childbirth, and in most instances, provide years of maternal care. The State does not compensate women for their services; instead, it assumes that they owe this duty as a matter of course."

Nor was Blackmun's new emphasis on personal autonomy limited to abortion. In 1986 he wrote a prescient dissent in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, the decision upholding a Georgia sodomy statute, saying, "What the Court really has refused to recognize is the fundamental interest all individuals have in controlling the nature of their intimate associations with others" (he did

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not live to see this view vindicated, and *Bowers* overturned, in 2003). Completing his migration toward the liberal end of the judicial spectrum, Blackmun also finally came out in opposition to the death penalty. For decades, he had refrained from imposing his personal opposition to the death penalty on the states, considering it the legislature's province. But in his last year on the bench, after growing frustration with the limitations the Rehnquist Court had placed on habeas corpus review, Blackmun decided that a lethal punishment that "remains fraught with arbitrariness, discrimination, caprice, and mistake" could no longer pass constitutional muster. A line in this dissent, drafted by a clerk and edited by Blackmun, became one of his most memorable: "From this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death."

It will take further study in the voluminous archive and interviews with clerks and contemporaries to fully access Harry Blackmun's life and tenure on the Court. (The May-June issue of *Legal Affairs* features an explosive article by the historian David Garrow, "The Brains Behind Blackmun," which raises questions about the degree of the late Justice's reliance on his clerks' work in his final years; former clerks have in turn come forward to dispute Garrow's assertions.) Because of Blackmun's authorship of the single most controversial decision in the modern history of the Supreme Court, his legacy is bound to be fought over tooth and nail.

But if there is one thing we can say for certain at this juncture, and that Greenhouse's book illustrates, it is the value of a truly independent judiciary—i.e., a system in which a man's or woman's intellect and conscience, as applied to the interpretation of text and doctrine, is allowed to grow and develop free of the ideological tether of his or her appointor. This is a value it is easy for liberals to appreciate in the case of men like Harry Blackmun and David Souter. But if we want to avoid real judicial tyranny, rather than the illusion of it lately conjured by conservatives, it is a value that must be defended with equal vigor when a judge's views move in the opposite direction. That is the content of a patriotism motivated by the ideal of a government of separate and equal powers. ■

Twist and Shout

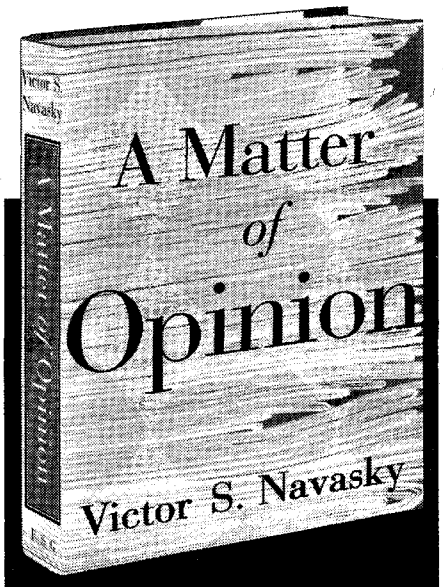
JAMES M. McPHERSON

WHAT LINCOLN BELIEVED: The Values and Convictions of America's Greatest President. By Michael Lind. Doubleday. 358 pp. $27.95.

The title of this book is incomplete. It should be *What Michael Lind Believes Abraham Lincoln Believed.* And what Lind believes suffers from a strange case of literary schizophrenia. In the first and last chapters, the author develops the theme that Lincoln was "the champion of liberal democracy" who "continues to inspire people throughout the world." But in the six interior chapters, this Dr. Jekyll Lincoln becomes a Mr. Hyde white supremacist and "lifelong segregationist" who wanted to create a racially homogeneous America by settling blacks in Africa or Haiti and who inspired the ethnic cleansing fantasies of such twentieth-century bigots as Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi. For good measure, Lind also brands President Lincoln as a "profoundly illiberal" executive who justified his wartime suspension of certain civil liberties with "sophistical reasoning and deliberate lies" and whose 1864 re-election was abetted by "massive electoral cheating."

Puzzled readers may be forgiven if they come away from this book convinced that Lincoln's beliefs were closer to those of the Ku Klux Klan than to those of the NAACP—for that is precisely Lind's argument in most of the book. Or perhaps they will conclude that Lind does not know what he is talking about when he maintains that there was no inconsistency between Lincoln the liberal democrat and Lincoln the racist despot. This conclusion would be reinforced by some of the alleged "facts" reported in these pages: that the Northwest

James M. McPherson, a professor of history at Princeton University, is the author of numerous books on the Civil War, most recently The Illustrated Battle Cry of Freedom *(Oxford).*



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Ordinance banned slavery in states (it applied only to territories); that the Dred Scott decision applied to a runaway slave in Ohio; that "most Northern states" in the 1850s banned free blacks from settling therein (only four of eighteen did); that William Seward was Secretary of State in the Grant Administration; that ratification by a simple majority of states could amend the Constitution; and that the Congress elected in 1936 contained 524 representatives and 112 senators (the actual numbers were 435 and 96, respectively).

These errors are not so serious as the erroneous premise on which Lind bases his interpretation of Lincoln the racist and his faulty use of evidence derived from this premise. Lind challenges what he describes as the orthodox separation of Lincoln's political career into two parts: the antebellum Whig follower of Henry Clay and the wartime Republican who proclaimed emancipation. Lind insists that we should think of Lincoln's career as a seamless whole: Clay's Whig policies of protective tariffs, government investment in economic infrastructure, a national banking system—*and* the colonization abroad of free blacks and freed slaves to leave America an all-white nation—remained Lincoln's lodestar for his entire life. It is quite true that Lincoln's economic ideas remained consistently Whiggish, though he added some Jeffersonian touches, such as the Homestead Act to settle farmers on Western lands and eloquent rhetoric about equal opportunity. (Lind of course argues that, like Jefferson, Lincoln meant equal opportunity for whites only.) But Lind's insistence that Lincoln's racial ideas and policies remained frozen and unchanging is, quite simply, wrong.

During the antebellum generation Lincoln did share with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Henry Clay and many others the conviction that voluntary, government-assisted emigration of freed slaves would ease the racial tensions that constituted a powerful obstacle to any plans for emancipation. Lincoln carried this conviction into the first year or more of the war, when violent opposition by many in the North and border states to the prospect of emancipation threatened to undermine support for the war effort. After December 1862, however, Lincoln never again publicly mentioned colonization. During the next two years both he and the Northern majority moved progressively from partial emancipation to the complete abolition of slavery by constitutional amendment, to the enlistment of freed slaves in the Union army, and to the beginnings of a commitment to their equal civil and political rights. But the reader will find almost no discussion of these developments in *What Lincoln Believed*, for they are inconsistent with the author's thesis of an unchanging, white-supremacist Lincoln.

One of Lind's rhetorical devices is to take Lincoln quotations out of context and then supply an artificial context to sustain his thesis. A case in point is Lincoln's colonizationist statements in 1862, whose principal purpose was to defuse dangerous opposition to war policies that now included emancipation. Another example comes from Lincoln's famous debates with Stephen Douglas in 1858, when Douglas shamelessly played the race card by accusing Lincoln of favoring black voting, interracial marriage and social equality, which were anathema to most Illinois voters. Lincoln's response that he did *not* favor these things, taken out of its political context, is easily twisted into a gratuitous expression of racism. Similarly, Lincoln's wartime suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the military trials of several civilians for treason can be made to look like egregious violations of civil liberties if they are presented as unconstitutional and typical, instead of as constitutional (suspension of habeas corpus) and untypical (military trials), which they were. And nowhere will the reader of this book learn that infringements of civil liberties in the North during the genuinely dangerous internal crisis of 1861–65 were relatively mild compared with the draconian enforcement of espionage and sedition laws during World War I and the internment of more than 100,000 innocent Japanese-Americans during World War II. As for the alleged "massive electoral cheating" by Republicans in 1864, it is simply untrue. Nor does Lind find room to mention the usual Democratic voting frauds by Boss William Tweed's Tammany Hall in New York City or the arrest and conviction of Democratic commissioners from New York for trying to stuff the ballot boxes with the Democratic votes of the state's soldiers at the front.

Lind portrays Lincoln as an unchanging white supremacist, glossing over—or simply ignoring—evidence that undercuts his thesis.

While Lind quotes Lincoln's white supremacist statements out of context, he also tends to ignore or gloss over contrary or extenuating evidence. The reader of this book will not find any reference to an 1858 speech by Lincoln in which he declared: "Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position.... Let us discard all these things, and...once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal." Almost absent from *What Lincoln Believed* is any discussion of Lincoln's commitment by 1863 to the enlistment of black soldiers in the Army, his praise for their contribution to Union victory and his belief that they had thereby earned equal citizenship. Lind does quote Lincoln's famous statement in 1863, read by millions, that if the North were to win the war "there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it." But Lind misses the main implication of these words—that black men who fought for the Union were more deserving of rights than white men who fought or spoke against it. Several times over the last two years of the war, Lincoln explicitly stated his belief that black veterans, along with literate blacks from civilian life, deserved the right to vote in postwar America. For Lind to acknowledge this belief, however, would undermine his continued insistence that Lincoln's preferred legacy was an all-white America purged of an African-American presence.

By either misreading evidence or by relying on untenable evidence, Lind misunderstands Lincoln's position on the issue of emancipation in 1862 and on Reconstruction in 1865. In July 1862 Congress passed a bill that confiscated the property (including slaves) of Confederates as a punishment for treason. Lincoln threatened to veto the legislation on technical grounds and because it violated the constitutional ban on bills of attainder. Lind mistakenly claims that the basis of Lincoln's objection was that the act "permanently deprived slave owners of their property without compensation." This is false. In his threatened veto message Lincoln explicitly endorsed permanent freedom for confiscated slaves; his objection concerned permanent confiscation of real property (slaves were chattel property),

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to which the bill of attainder clause in the Constitution applied. Congress modified the law to meet Lincoln's objections, whereupon he signed it. And while getting this matter wrong, Lind also neglects to mention that at precisely this time (July 1862), Lincoln wrote and presented to the Cabinet the first draft of his Emancipation Proclamation, which declared that slaves in rebellious states shall "forever be free."

Lind's treatment of Lincoln's conception of Reconstruction illustrates many of the problems of evidence, and its interpretation, that plague this book. "If Lincoln had lived," he writes, "it is unlikely that he woud have supported anything like the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments." As evidence for such an assertion, Lind cites an article in the *New York Times* from August 28, 1860! Lincoln "declares his opposition to negro suffrage," reported the *Times*, "and to everything looking towards placing negroes upon a footing of political and social equality with the whites; but he asserts for them a perfect equality of civil and personal rights under the Constitution." To cite a secondhand statement from 1860 to describe what Lincoln might or might have done after 1865 is a perfect illustration of how not to write history. Moreover, the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments had nothing to do with social equality; the Fourteenth in 1868 mandated precisely the equality of civil and personal rights that, according to the *Times*, Lincoln had supported in 1860. And during the last year of the Civil War Lincoln moved step by step toward support for black voting rights, which the Fifteenth Amendment stipulated in 1870.

In what turned out to be his last public speech, on April 11, 1865, Lincoln discussed the question of Reconstruction before a crowd that had gathered at the White House to celebrate (most of them, at least) Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox two days earlier. Looking toward the future, Lincoln expressed a preference for enfranchisement of literate freedmen and black Union army veterans in the postwar South. He also promised an announcement, in the near future, of his new policy for restoration of the South to the Union. "That means nigger citizenship," snarled John Wilkes Booth to a companion in the crowd. "Now, by God, I'll put him through.... That is the last speech he will ever make." Like Martin Luther King Jr. a century later, Lincoln was murdered by an instrument of the very idea of white supremacy that this flawed book would have us believe formed the core of his beliefs. ■

Cosmopolis

ADAM LeBOR

SALONICA, CITY OF GHOSTS: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950.
By Mark Mazower. Knopf. 490 pp. $35.

The Great European Project is running into the sand nowadays. Even the Franco-German axis, its central bastion, is crumbling under the pressure of resurgent nationalism. The unruly French are threatening to vote no in the May 29 referendum on whether or not to ratify the European Constitution, which will form the basis of the continent-wide superstate. Britain and the Czech Republic are likely soon to follow. Germany complains ever louder about the cost of supporting the Polish and Slovak economies as these countries race ahead, attracting a torrent of foreign investment. The nation-state, it seems, remains robust.

But at a sometimes high price. Its imposition in the former Yugoslavia has been disastrous, helping trigger the wars of the early 1990s and feeding simmering ethnic conflicts that could erupt again in Kosovo and Macedonia. Yet fighting and dying over faiths and flags in the Balkans is a comparatively new development, as Mark Mazower's timely, magnificent and sometimes unbearably poignant chronicle of Salonica shows. His account of the (now) northern Greek port city brings alive a lost world, one with much to teach contemporary Europe about the nature of identity and nationality. Home for centuries to Christians, Muslims and Jews, Salonica was a cosmopolitan world where people of various cultures and religions lived side by side under the tolerance of Ottoman rule. Even the shoeshine boys spoke half a dozen languages, from Greek and Turkish to Ladino (Judeo-Spanish). The Sublime Porte was better grounded in the reality of statehood than its contemporary Christian rivals. It was easier and more beneficial to let minorities prosper than persecute them. When in 1492 Spain's King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella expelled the Jews, Sultan Bayezid II looked on in wonder: "They tell me that Ferdinand of Spain is a wise man but he is a fool, for he takes his treasure and sends it all to me." With the Sultan's blessings, Spain's Jews poured into the Ottoman lands and soon flourished under Muslim rule. It was a wise as well as humane decision, for they brought expertise

Mevlevi dervishes in Salonica, c.1900

Adam LeBor, the Central Europe correspondent for the Times *of London, is the author, most recently, of* Slobodan Milosevic: A Biography *(Yale). His next nonfiction book, about the lives of six Arab and Jewish families in Jaffa, will be published in February 2006 by Bloomsbury UK.*

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in medicine, science and technology that helped to revitalize the empire and to fuel the great Ottoman expansions of the sixteenth century.

Of all the towns in the empire, writes Mazower, Salonica benefited the most. By 1520 more than half of the city's 30,000-strong population was Jewish, and it was one of the most important ports of the eastern Mediterranean. Under a Muslim administration and largely Jewish labor force, the city prospered. For the Sephardim, Salonica truly was a new Jerusalem. They simply transported medieval Spain across the waters and re-created it, preserving its dialects, foods and customs, and worshiping in synagogues named for the lost lands of Aragon and Catalonia; Mazower has deftly mined local archives and records to bring forth a rich haul of colorful details about everyday life. Salonica's Jews did not, it seems, always practice the tolerance they sought. One group of Greeks appealed to the Ottoman authorities to stop their Jewish neighbors from emptying their rubbish into the churchyard and mocking them from their windows.

Neighborly spats aside, the city was also a fertile ground for heterodox beliefs that almost seemed to merge all three faiths. There were Marranos, Jews who had converted to Catholicism but secretly practiced their ancestral faith at home; new Christians, who were Jewish by descent but practicing Catholics, both liable to be dubbed "ships with two rudders" by their contemporaries. In the seventeenth century Salonica's Jews descended into a kind of collective madness over their adoration of the false Messiah Sabbatai Zevi, who had preached in the Marranos' synagogue, at least until he changed his name to Aziz Mehmed Efendi and converted to Islam. Hundreds of his followers also became Muslims, and blended the two faiths in a community they called the Ma'min, or faithful. By 1900 Salonica's Judeo-Muslim Ma'min community was 10,000 strong, one of the most extraordinary footnotes in Ottoman history.

The close proximity of all three faiths made for an atmosphere of religious and spiritual devotion. Salonica was "covered in a dense grid of holy places," writes Mazower. The Sufi orders, which helped spread Islam through the Balkans, had more than twenty shrines and monasteries in Salonica. Their liberal attitudes toward alcohol, opium and tobacco often brought them into conflict with more orthodox Muslim clerics. The city's indigenous Greeks fared less well. Salonica's spiritual guardian, St. Dimitrios, had not saved the city from enslavement by the Turks. The Christian community was small, impoverished and almost powerless. The great Byzantine families had mostly left. Salonica was a backwater in comparison with Athens or Mount Athos. The church was authoritarian, fractious and disorganized. Many of Salonica's Christians were not even Greeks but Slavs. Still, the port's growing prosperity made it a magnet for economic migrants from across the Balkans. Bulgarians and Macedonians, Slavs and Albanians, flocked to the city. The warlike Albanians were recruited into the pashas' private militias, raised to counter the threat from the mutinous Janissaries, the empire's standing army. The Albanians "brought with them an aggressively uncomplicated approach to life," notes Mazower dryly. Albanian salutations included: "Eat shit," "I'll fuck your mother," "I'll fuck your wife" and even "I'll fart in your nose."

In Ottoman-ruled, cosmopolitan Salonica, even the shoeshine boys spoke a half-dozen languages, from Greek and Turkish to Ladino.

Salonica's pashas, though, had sown dragon's teeth. The Albanians soon turned on their former masters. When the authorities tried to arrest one troublemaker called Alizotoglou in 1793, they discovered his house was less a dwelling place than a military garrison, home to 150 Albanians, all well supplied with food and arms. Alizotoglou left only after his house was bombarded by cannon fire and then took hostages with him. The story is eerily prescient of the Kosovo war of the late 1990s, when Kosovo Liberation Army leaders such as Adem Jashari operated from walled family compounds in their home villages. Serb forces attacked the Jashari compound in early March 1998, like their Ottoman predecessors, bombarding it with artillery. By the end of the day fifty-eight members of the Jashari clan lay dead, including twenty-eight women and children.

Salonica, City of Ghosts is peppered with mini-vignettes of fascinating characters, such as the Ukrainian exile Pylyp Orlyk and a corrupt moneylender with the unlikely name of John "Jackie" Abbot. Orlyk spent twelve years in Salonica, and his diary provides a vivid and tantalizing glimpse of life in the eighteenth-century Ottoman city. Orlyk lived well, hunting partridges, hogs and hares, and drinking vast amounts with his interpreter and servant, who was often found sprawled in the gutter after a heavy night. Thus the joys of Salonican life. The minor perils included indigestion from overindulging, bribery to keep officials happy and stepping around the dirt and dung that covered the streets. More serious were the gunfights between the Janissaries and random armed gangs. Sultan Mahmud II finally solved the problem of the janissaries in 1826 by massacring them all. Scribes recorded the slaughter as "the auspicious event."

As for Jackie Abbot, he was "Greek by religion, [but] British by nationality." Abbot was a sort of Salonican Tony Soprano, living in the city's grandest villa, with a fountain that shot water twenty meters into the air. He started out as a leech trader, an apt metaphor. Abbot's friends were bribed with diamond-studded pipes and vast sums of money, his enemies thrown in prison. When in the mid-nineteenth century Sultan Abdul Mecid visited Salonica, Abbot had the entire six-mile road to his house covered with carpets, insuring that the imperial carriage would not have to suffer bumps. Abbot's stove was brought for coffee, the flames fed by bank notes. But as the Sultan was about to step down onto the carpet, the skies clouded over and there was a clap of thunder.

The days of the Abbot family, like those of the empire itself, were numbered. Ravaged by the Balkan wars of the early twentieth century, the crumbling Ottoman Empire ceded Salonica to Greece in 1912. The city was renamed Thessaloniki, and the Muslim exodus began. It was finished in 1923, when Turkey and Greece "exchanged," or in reality expelled, their Christian and Muslim populations. Hundreds of thousands of lives were upended in conditions of great cruelty in the disastrous pursuit of ethnic homogeneity. By the end of January 1925 there were just ninety-seven Muslims left in the city, most of them foreign nationals. The Muslims at least made new lives in Kemal Ataturk's new state of Turkey. Salonica's Jews stayed on under their new Greek masters—until, in April 1941, the Nazis arrived.

Mazower is a professor of history at both Columbia University and Birkbeck College, London, whose previous works include the prizewinning *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* and *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation 1941–1944*. His account of the end of Salonica's Jews

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makes for grim reading. He quotes from a heartbreaking series of letters, sent by a woman called Neama to her sons in Athens as the Holocaust unfolded. Salonica's Jews were enduring scenes that they had previously seen only in the cinema and history books, she explained. "For two nights we sat on the bed, dressed, waiting for the knock on the door to wake us and take us away. Everyone is selling things in the streets to buy food.... The cries, moans and tragedy cannot be described." While some individuals helped save and shelter Jews, officialdom stood aside. Most depressing of all was the reaction of Salonica's commercial classes, whose families had traded with the city's Jews for centuries but who turned their backs in the Jews' hour of need. In contrast to Athens, where the Archbishop Damaskinos—and the city's professional associations—protested against the deportations, the Metropolitan of Salonica, Gennadios, stayed quiescent. About 45,000 Jews were sent to Auschwitz, most of whom were killed soon after their arrival. A unique part of Europe's heritage, a 450-year-old time capsule of medieval Spain, vanished in the smokestacks and crematoriums. A few hundred survivors returned after the war, to find, as Mazower notes, a city "transformed and unrecognizable." Yehuda Perahia, a tobacco merchant, wrote:

> How into rusty iron pure gold has been transmuted!
> How what was ours has been changed into a foreign symbol!...
> I walk through the streets of this blessed city.
> Despite the sun, it seems to stand in darkness.

The Salonica that entranced visitors with its mosques and synagogues, churches and dervish tombs, is gone forever. The medieval synagogues named for Spanish provinces and cities were destroyed in the fire of 1917. Almost all Salonica mosques and *tekkes* (Muslim monasteries) were demolished soon after Greece assumed sovereignty. The Jewish cemetery was flattened, and is now the site of the university. The Marranos and the Ma'min have vanished. As for Salonica's Albanians and Bulgarians, its Vlachs and Slavs, who now remembers them? A dreary modernization has reduced one of the wonders of the world to a drab seaside metropolis, studded with a few historic monuments. In 1992 the city was the center of the hysterical state-sponsored campaign to deny recognition to the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, which had declared independence. Greece forced the new state to be known by the cumbersome title of "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia," or FYROM, to distinguish itself from the Greek province of Macedonia. Furious arguments erupted over the origin of Salonica's most famous son: Alexander the Great, son of Philip II of Macedon, who founded the city in the fourth century BC. Was he Greek or Macedonian?

Does it matter? Not really. Yet the campaign highlighted how uneasily the modern Salonica sits with its past, like an errant son who destroyed the historic family home and replaced it with a shopping mall. Today, the Hamza Bey mosque "stands forlornly in the centre of town like an unwanted guest." The seafront cafes look out on a wide, traffic-filled avenue that reeks of exhaust fumes. When, after years of lobbying by the Jewish community, a Holocaust memorial was finally erected in 1997, it was built not in the city center square where the Jews were rounded up but on the road to the airport. Ironically, as Mazower points out, now that the city fathers have wiped out most of Salonica's architectural gems, there is a new manic drive to preserve what little has survived. But even a cursory visit, and a stroll along the wide and utterly unremarkable shopping avenues of the downtown city, show that it is too late. Only in the upper town, in the Kastra quarter, where winding lanes of gabled Ottoman houses open onto shady, hidden squares, does something of Salonica's spirit linger. Kastra has been rediscovered by Salonica's professional classes. Its houses are being restored, its steep lanes cleaned up. Here the ghost of the Sufi holy man Mousa Baba is still sometimes seen wandering. For Salonica's dead outnumber the living, and ghosts are all that is left. ■

Zippie World!

GEORGE SCIALABBA

THE WORLD IS FLAT: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century.
By Thomas L. Friedman. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 488 pp. $27.50.

In the middle of Thomas Friedman's *The World Is Flat* is a long quote that towers over the intellectual landscape of the rest of the book like a mountain over low hills. It is Marx and Engels's celebrated prophecy of globalization in *The Communist Manifesto*—"All that is solid melts into air." Friedman has apparently just discovered it and is "in awe at how incisively Marx detailed the forces that were flattening the world during the rise of the Industrial Revolution, and how much he foreshadowed the way these same forces would keep flattening the world right up to the present."

Friedman is right to be impressed, however belatedly. After the long detour of Second and Third World pseudosocialism, capitalism has resumed the path Marx and Engels foresaw: toward one wholly rationalized, seamlessly integrated world; with everything for sale; with no one and no activity exempt from the pressure of competition, the risk of obsolescence, the specter of ruin; with no rest, no external haven, no inner sanctuary. A flat world.

This second great age of globalization began, by Friedman's reckoning, on "11/9." (The Berlin wall came down on November 9, 1989.) "In the Cold War era," he explained in his bestselling *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999), "capital could not move across borders the way it can in today's globalization system." Many national governments did not permit foreign ownership of core industries, foreign speculation in their currencies or unrestricted foreign access to their domestic markets. (Since the United States was the world's dominant economy, for "foreign" read "American.") They could get away with this because in the pseudosocialist bloc people were not free and in any case did not know what they were missing out on, while in the Free World, the United States was wary of alienating its geopolitical allies. Friedman's account of "the Cold War system" in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* is accurate and illuminating, as far as it goes. There is no damned nonsense (or very

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little) here about "freedom"—except for the freedom of those with a lot of capital to do anything they please with it. That is indeed what the cold war was about.

The end of the cold war made it politically feasible, and computerization made it technically feasible, to move capital around the world at dazzling speeds and staggering volumes without interference from any but the most determined governments. This allows large investors to buy control of a country's key resources, industries and infrastructure, to put intense upward or downward pressure on its currency and thereby to influence, or even dictate, its fiscal, environmental, labor and tax policies. These new masters of the universe, gathered around computer screens in New York, London, Frankfurt and Tokyo, are members of what Friedman calls, in one of the most memorable of his many piquant coinages, the "Electronic Herd."

According to Friedman, zippies—the children of Indian and Chinese capitalism—will inherit the earth. They are anything but meek.

What lures the Herd to graze in an economy is a favorable investment climate; or, to mix that metaphor with another charming Friedmanism, the "Golden Straitjacket." Donning the Straitjacket means low social-welfare expenditures; low or no tariffs or subsidies to protect domestic industries; no barriers to foreign ownership, currency speculation or profit repatriation; and a flexible labor market—i.e., no unions. (If you want to know more precisely what a "favorable investment climate" looks like, study the decrees of the Coalition Provisional Authority, which were designed—without consulting any nonrich Iraqis—to fit post-Saddam Iraq for the Straitjacket.) All this is bitter medicine, but salutary:

> Governments...that deviate too far from the core rules will see their investors stampede away, interest rates rise, and stock market valuations fall. The only way to get more room to maneuver in the Golden Straitjacket is by enlarging it, and the only way to enlarge it is by keeping it on tight.... The tighter you wear it, the more gold it produces and the more padding you can then put into it for your society.

Such is the canonical view of globalization. Friedman is exceptionally, exuberantly in our face about it, insisting that its harsh discipline is not merely a necessary evil but also fair, economically rewarding and in fact democracy-enhancing. You can rail at the stampeding Herd for leaving your country's social safety net in tatters, your unemployment rate several points higher and many people's life savings diminished as the currency plummets. It's no one's fault, though, but yours and your spendthrift government's. "There's no one in charge!" Friedman admonishes. Capital-attraction and capital-repulsion are, in his world-view, neutral processes, like laws of nature.

And playing by the "core rules" will not only make your society richer; it will also make you freer. (Friedman's boosterish, lapel-grabbing use of the second-person pronoun is contagious, I'm afraid.) "The democratizations of technology, finance, and information," he enthuses, "are at the heart of the globalization system." You can't keep your population down on the farm, politically speaking, once they've plugged into the Net. Moreover, corruption, nepotism, bureaucratic incompetence and arbitrary power (unless it's awfully secure—more secure than despots tend to be these days) are bad for business; the rule of law, a professional civil service, accurate and accessible statistics and a stable, legitimate government are good for business. If your society wants to prosper, it will shape up. This "revolution from beyond" Friedman calls "globalution."

The World Is Flat is an updated report from the field. Whatever one thinks of Friedman as an analyst (and I'd say there's only one possible opinion of him as a prose stylist), he's an energetic reporter and a good storyteller. His new book teems with interesting anecdotes about innovative companies, technologies and business processes. Everyone's heard by now of the book's opening gambit: his wide-eyed tour of the call centers of Bangalore, India, where adolescents rechristened "Derek" and "Daisy" practice saying "Thirty little turtles in a bottle of bottled water" in order to communicate with Americans frantic about lost luggage or frozen computers. There's also a brief history of open-sourcing: of how Linux and Apache grew, on virtually pure anarchist principles, to become the backbone of the Internet. In counterpoint, one learns how Wal-Mart (of whose principles there's no need to speak) conquered the world by becoming "the best supply chain operator of all time," in the words of an awed business consultant.

Supply-chaining is one of the world-flattening forces that are kicking globalization up to another level. Outsourcing, offshoring, work-flow software, digitization—every new organizational and technological development tends to divide, isolate, simplify and cheapen the production process. An old friend of Friedman's used to be an illustrator. Now, thanks to design programs like Quark and Photoshop, he's JAFA (Just Another Fucking Artist). His skills have become "vanilla"—Friedmanese for expendable, a mere commodity—so he has "transformed himself into an ideas consultant," supplying drawing concepts that are outsourced for production. This is the fate of a good half the characters who crowd Friedman's book. While unassumingly making a living, they are overtaken by labor-saving technology and turned into inexpensive vanilla ice cream. Fortunately, they somehow manage to reinvent themselves as a pricier "chocolate sauce" or "the cherries on top," and the GDP continues its steady ascent.

The book's other characters include dynamic executives who are sponsoring all this outsourcing, offshoring and vanilla-ization. The go-go chairman of Rolls-Royce (which naturally doesn't make cars anymore—too vanilla) spouts this choice bit of New Economy–speak, which greatly impresses Friedman: "We own the ability to identify and define what product is required by our customers, we own the ability to integrate the latest science into making these products, we own the route to the market for these products, and we own the ability to collect and understand the data generated by those customers using our products, enabling us to support that product while in service and constantly add value." Can you guess from that babble what Rolls-Royce *does* make now?

Perhaps most impressive and intimidating are the "zippies," the alpha fauna of Friedman's brave new flat world. Zippies are "the huge cohort of Indian youth who are the first to come of age since India shifted away from socialism and dived headfirst into global trade and the information revolution by turning itself into the world's service center." An Indian magazine calls them "Liberalization's Children," and they rule: "young city or suburban resident, between 15 and 25 years of age, with a zip in the stride. Belongs to Generation Z. Can be male or female, studying or working. Oozes attitude, ambition, and aspiration. Cool, confident, and creative. Seeks challenges, loves risks, and shuns fear.... destination driven, not des-

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tiny driven, outward looking, not inward, upwardly mobile, not stuck-in-my-station-in-life." An even bigger cohort of Chinese zippies, Friedman warns, are only a few years behind them, and together they are going to blow their lazy, spoiled American contemporaries away.

It's tempting to smirk at this ad-copy prose and at the rest of Friedman's hymn to the Grand Global March of Productivity. There are serious empirical and analytical questions about it all, too. As Doug Henwood in *After the New Economy* and Eamonn Fingleton in *Unsustainable* have shown, prophecies of permanent, digitally driven prosperity look pretty dubious. Real pay for most US workers, Henwood notes, is lower than in 1973; and as Fingleton points out, "with almost no exceptions, manufacturing-oriented economies...outpaced the United States in income growth in the 1980s and '90s." And that income growth was more evenly distributed than in the United States. It's highly plausible that the growth of the information economy has contributed to America's notable income inequality. The skill premiums, obstacles to unionizing and even greater ease with which nonmanufacturing jobs can be outsourced all tend to exacerbate income disparities. In fact, virtually the only industry in which information technology has made an unquestioned and substantial contribution to productivity is financial services. And that, from society's point of view, may well be no more beneficial than gains in the gaming industry would be—of which, arguably, the capital markets deserve to be considered a part.

Bringing the blessings of capital markets to the rest of the world was one of the chief benefits of globalization in the 1990s, Friedman proclaimed in *Lexus*. In one of that book's most obnoxious passages, he announced, "I believe globalization did us all a favor by melting down the economies of Thailand, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, and Brazil in the 1990s, because it laid bare a lot of rotten practices and institutions in countries that had prematurely globalized." Apart from its callousness, this and other comments by Friedman on the Asian financial crisis of 1997–98 made clear that he had misunderstood its lessons: that someone *is* in charge of the Electronic Herd and the capital markets; that it's the IMF (which takes its orders from the US Treasury); and that following the IMF's prescriptions left countries more, not less, vulnerable to being whipsawed.

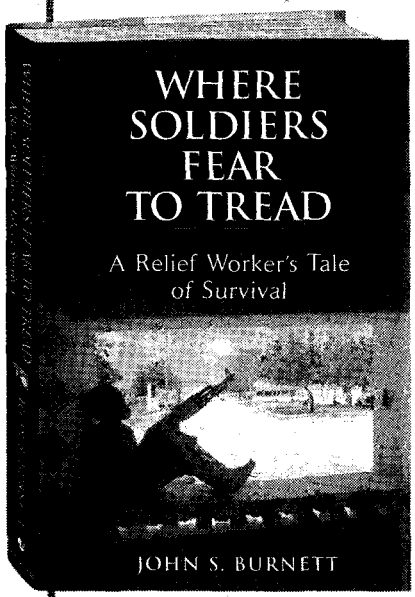
Still, Friedman is far from heartless. There's a frank recognition of the pain of globalization in *Lexus*, and even in the surprising statement that "you dare not be a globalizer today without being a social democrat." In *The World Is Flat* he writes, "The social contract that progressives should try to enforce between government and workers, and companies and workers, is one in which government and companies say, 'We cannot guarantee you any lifetime employment. But we can guarantee you that government and companies will focus on giving you the tools to make you more lifetime employable.'" In a flat world, "the individual worker is going to become more and more responsible for managing his or her own career, risks, and economic security, and the job of government and business is to help workers build the necessary muscles to do that."

Friedman offers three simple, sensible muscle-building proposals: portable-pension legislation, portable health insurance (with plans negotiated by government, not individual employers) and two years of government-subsidized tertiary education for everyone. (If he were a bit braver, he might have emphasized that all this and much more like it could have been accomplished for a fraction of the amount wasted on the richest 1 percent by the Bush tax cuts.) He even has a suggestion for the antiglobalization left, whose idealism he professes to admire: Form NGOs in Africa, India and China that will "promote accountability, transparency, education, and property rights" and help "ensure that the poor get the infrastructure and budgets to which they are entitled." After all, the poor, too, yearn to join the flat world: "The wretched of the earth want to go to Disneyland, not to the barricades."

I wouldn't presume to badmouth Disneyland to the poor. But one may well feel a bit uneasy about the quality of life in the flat world. When informed excitedly by a mid-nineteenth-century Thomas Friedman that Maine and Texas could now communicate by telegraph, Thoreau remarked, "But Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing to communicate." History does not record Friedman-then's reply, but Friedman-now would have absolutely no idea what Thoreau was talking about. That information technology might have the effect of making life, at least in some respects, less gracious, subtle, sensuous and profound, but instead more sterile, frenetic, shallow and routine—there is no inkling of this in *The World Is Flat*.

"If you are just a little too slow or too costly—in a world where the walls

This is the story you won't see on the evening news.



John Burnett, a former journalist and speechwriter, left Washington to join the UN relief efforts in Somalia. This is his dramatic and eye-opening account of humanity, hope, and survival—an unforgettable tribute to the brave men and women who risk their lives to help save others.

"Captures the rush, the horror, the utter insanity of trying to do the right thing in the face of war and anarchy.... At once a rousing adventure story and a troubling morality tale." —Michael Maren, author of *The Road to Hell*

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around your business have been removed and competition can now come from anywhere—you will be left as roadkill before you know what hit you." It sounds like the war of all against all—"turbocharged," to use one of Friedman's favorite adjectives—and the ultimate weapon, the focus of creativity, the highest achievement of this new stage of civilization is apparently...ever-newer operations-flow software, to optimize your business process. Except for those Third World NGOs, no one in the flat world seems to be doing anything of loftier significance than getting Wal-Mart's suppliers to make deliveries just a few minutes nearer to ship time or inventing a new radio-frequency identification microchip to track its inventory.

Well, it will be the zippies' world, not mine. I'm sure they will be fully as cool, confident and creative, as ambitious, aspiring and attitudinal, as Friedman promises. I only hope they'll have enough imagination to be bored. ■

An Acquired Taste

LINDA COLLEY

IRRESISTIBLE EMPIRE: America's Advance Through 20th-Century Europe.
By Victoria de Grazia. Harvard. 586 pp. $29.95.

"Relations between nations have become so easy and close through modern technology and the communication it makes possible," wrote Adolf Hitler in 1928, "that the European, often without being conscious of it, applies American conditions as a standard for his own." At one level, this was a fitting and straightforward tribute to a major revolution that is still working itself out. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, products and tastes developed in America have increasingly influenced lifestyles in Europe, whereas in previous centuries it was generally the other way around. The crucial determinants of this volte-face are well-known. Between the Civil War and 1914, the United States went from being the world's fourth most industrially productive power to being the most effective wealth-generating machine in human history, with a clear lead in petrochemicals and electrical goods, and in a wide range of consumer products, including sewing machines, typewriters, razors and, of course, automobiles. This takeoff into self-sustained economic dominance can partly be explained by America's huge size, vast resources and the ingenuity of its rapidly burgeoning population. But external forces were also at work. After 1914 the old Western European states twice tore themselves and their economies apart in major wars, and Russia and Japan were also devastated by conflict. The result was America's century, which is not yet over more than 100 years on.

Victoria de Grazia's concern in her important, richly detailed, sometimes eccentric book is not primarily with the economics or the political or military history of American dominance of Europe but, rather, with consumer culture. Her subject is "the rise of a great imperium with the outlook of a great emporium": how America's products, producers and salesmen, with the full cognizance and backing of its politicians, came after 1900 to transform not just the purchasing habits and desires of Europeans but also their ideas about society and themselves.

A professor of Italian history at Columbia University, de Grazia explores these processes through a succession of "exemplary cases." She looks at how the Rotary Club movement, which began in Chicago, was taken up and subtly modified by business enthusiasts in towns and cities across Europe. By the 1920s the familiar Golden Wheel had become a symbol of prosperous male sociability in more than 370 places in Britain, with still more offshoots scattered throughout its empire. She shows how American chain stores, notably those started in Pennsylvania by Frank Woolworth, gradually infiltrated European cities, challenging the established duopoly of department stores for the wealthy and corner shops for the nonmobile poor. She explains how the bold visuals of European poster art receded before very different American styles of advertising. She demonstrates that the fiction of an "American standard of living" had come to be widely accepted by the 1930s, and makes clear how slow European nations were in catching up with this perceived ideal. As late as 1954, a survey found that less than a quarter of French households had running hot water and that more than 90 percent had no refrigerator. Conversely, America's industrial pre-eminence and association with abundance meant that many of its brand names came to acquire the status of generics. Twentieth-century Europeans yearned for a Singer, not just a sewing machine; and they went out and purchased a Ford, not just a car, although in 1920s Britain a color was specially devised for that market, "Imperial Grey."

Here, as elsewhere in this book, Roland Barthes's ironic observation about consumer societies seems entirely appropriate: namely, that—in de Grazia's paraphrase—"trends...that are not at all natural are regarded as 'it goes without saying,' such that nobody recalls whence they came into being." In reality, as she underscores, a great deal of calculation went into this (partial) Americanization of Europe.

De Grazia begins *Irresistible Empire* with President Woodrow Wilson's injunction to a salesmen's congress in Detroit in 1916. America's "democracy of business," he told them, had to take the lead in "the struggle for the peaceful conquest of the world." As had been true of Britain's "informal empire" in the nineteenth century, American economic hegemony after 1900 was powered by governments and established elites, not just by private enterprise and individual entrepreneurs. Cadres of clever young men from Yale, Princeton and Dartmouth beavered away in the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commeree, or as commercial consular attachés overseas. A mixture of protectionist policies and flexible interpretations of antitrust legislation enormously assisted Hollywood's takeover of the cinematic world. And then there was the Marshall Plan, which was more than a remarkable act of transatlantic generosity. Europe's battered economies were retooled after 1945, de Grazia insists, both to insure that the continent remained a prime market for US goods and also in such a way as to instill among its people "new ways of thinking about producing affluence." The Second World War, and American dominance, also speeded up the fall of Europe's colonial empires. These had previously functioned as "ghost acreage" for small countries like France and Britain, giving them vicarious access to

Linda Colley, the Shelby M.C. Davis 1958 Professor of History at Princeton, is the author, most recently, of Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World, 1600–1850 *(Pantheon).*

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the sort of abundant territory, resources and customers that the United States took for granted within its own boundaries. But now these plundered supplements went, and Europe was reduced to political and cultural as well as economic clientage.

Or was it? De Grazia's book is full of interesting detail and shrewd insights, but her methodology and scope leave one dissatisfied. She supplies abundant examples of how various Europeans have come to adopt US products and practices since 1900, but the wider significance of this transatlantic mimicry remains unclear. The scale of American takeovers of European companies and the influence of the dollar over European stock markets and currencies are manifestly important, and more hard economic information on these developments would have been useful. But the significance of consumer choices and conventions is far less straightforward than the author tends to suggest. As the historian T.H. Breen has shown, between 1750 and 1775, the American colonies eagerly imported British consumer goods in previously unprecedented amounts—the very era in which they also plotted their independence. So what exactly does the sort of American advance through Europe that de Grazia explores reveal about broader politics and attitudes?

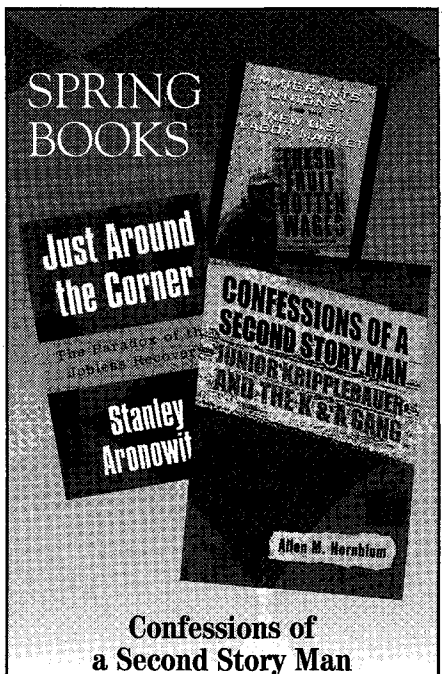
This question is further complicated by the fact that "America" and "Europe" were and are very far from being homogenous entities. Throughout this book, America is predictably treated as the essence of economic modernity. Yet by some criteria—and even well into the twentieth century—parts of America were less developed and less sophisticated than parts of Europe, and arguably remain so even now. Already by the 1850s, more Britons lived in towns than in the countryside; in the United States, by contrast, the number of urban dwellers didn't exceed country folk until the 1920s. Indeed, while conceding America's unrivaled economic clout, it is worth considering the degree to which the past century witnessed several paths toward economic change, and not just one. The historian Sheldon Garon's current work on thrift, for instance, is showing how, since Samuel Smiles's best-seller *Self Help* (1859), different European countries have taken the lead in urging the virtues of saving rather than consumption, and have influenced various non-European countries, classically Japan, to do the same. In a more ecologically challenged world, it may well be that saving, and not just consuming, turns out to be the way of the future.

And as the continued cult of saving in countries like France suggests, while Europe has savored portions of the American dream, it has simultaneously gone its own way in other respects. Most Europeans love American films and kitchen equipment; they respond far less enthusiastically to advertisements (in whatever graphic style) promoting American-style privatized healthcare. Furthermore, there is no single monolithic entity called "Europe." De Grazia takes the view that "nationality is an invention in the best of circumstances." This may be so, but the differences in experience between the European states remain significant. Many of de Grazia's examples are drawn from Germany, which she regards as the epitome of old bourgeois "European" culture and the only European power that might have contested US reach. But by focusing so much on a country that was defeated and invaded in two world wars, she inevitably offers a somewhat distorted view of relations between America and the rest of Europe. Thus, while her account of the devastation of Leipzig, formerly the site of a major international trade fair for more than seven centuries, is a wonderful set piece, it is also too extreme to serve as a general model.

Still, in some respects, this reminder of war's destruction is salutary. For much of this book, war is the proverbial elephant in the room, omnipresent but never thoroughly acknowledged or investigated. She touches on the cold war in the context of the Marshall Plan; but—as with the other wars that transformed Europe—it is only mentioned in passing (unlike, say, the rise of Rotary Clubs). This is very much a work informed by current notions of cultural criticism and relatively unconcerned with the sort of questions of political, military and hard economic power that once preoccupied historians.

As a result, one is left wondering how much of Europe's economic emulation of the United States after 1900 was due to the latter's size, economies of scale and innovation, and how much to the former's lethally competitive state system and multiplicity of nations. "In the United States, per capita income...nearly doubled again from 1909 to 1942," de Grazia remarks at one point, but "France showed no visible gains at all in per capita income from 1913 to 1947. Nor did Germany or Italy." Given what occurred between these dates in these last three countries, this scarcely seems surprising.

By the same token, one wonders how far Western Europe's economic resurgence in the past couple of decades—something



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de Grazia touches on in her conclusion—is due not simply to the adoption of US business techniques and consumer tastes but to the US military bases that are dotted across the continent, the hard face of America's soft power. By pouring so much money and so many men into Western Europe's defense, the United States has buttressed its own hegemony. It has also allowed European governments to skimp on armaments and spend far more than they otherwise could on economic development at home. This would seem a suitably ironic conclusion to a deeply ironic book. Much has been published on American empire and on the transatlantic divide in recent years. The great virtue of this work is that it takes a provocative and unusual line. De Grazia illustrates how empires can seduce and not simply coerce. Unknowingly, perhaps, she also shows how an empire that sets out to dominate and exploit may in some respects also end up being exploited. ■

Revolutionary Suicide

ANDREW RICE

I DIDN'T DO IT FOR YOU: How the World Betrayed a Small African Nation.
By Michela Wrong. HarperCollins. 448 pp. $25.95.

In the scandal-steeped spring of 1998, President Bill Clinton left behind Washington, Kenneth Starr and the Lewinsky-obsessed press and traveled to Africa. He spent twelve days there, tripling the collective amount of time all his predecessors had spent south of the Sahara and throwing himself into a tour of the continent with the same barnstorming, flesh-pressing, emotive spirit that animated his political campaigns. Stepping off Air Force One in Ghana, where he was greeted by a raucous crowd of an estimated half-million, Clinton declared that it was "time for Americans to put a new Africa on our map." At every whistle-stop, from Senegal to South Africa to Uganda, Clinton extolled an "African renaissance," outlining his vision of a continent that was self-reliant and self-possessed, that took responsibility for its failings and demanded free trade with the West, not foreign aid from it.

When asked to identify the exemplars of this renaissance, Clinton's aides pointed to four young, dynamic leaders: Yoweri Museveni of Uganda, Paul Kagame of Rwanda, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea. These four had much in common. They were all vigorous leaders, relatively untainted by corruption. They said the right things about democracy. Most important, the members of the quartet had all once been rebel leaders, and had shot their way to power—which was deemed acceptable because the governments they replaced were so uniformly abysmal. Clinton's blessing confirmed their status as "Africa's new soldier princes," as the *New York Times* reporter Howard French calls them in his recent book *A Continent for the Taking*, enlightened authoritarians who would guide their countries to peace and prosperity.

There is a long tradition of white men coming to Africa and hailing new leaders—Guinea's Sekou Touré in the 1960s, Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe in the 1980s—as avatars of the future, only to discover, a few disappeared dissidents later, that their heroes were just old palm wine in new calabashes. Clinton's flight of optimistic fancy unraveled in less than a year. Just a few months after the President's Africa visit, Museveni and Kagame, then close friends, teamed up to invade their mineral-rich mutual neighbor, Congo. By 1999, like the gold-crazed prospectors in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, they had turned on each other. As Ugandan and Rwandan soldiers battled over Congolese booty, the conflict degenerated into a bloody morass.

Ethiopia and Eritrea, meanwhile, went to war that very spring, fighting what journalist Michela Wrong calls "the worst conflict ever staged between two armies in Africa." This is a somewhat misleading designation, since most African conflicts have been civil wars. Still, it was nasty. In battles that employed cold war weaponry and Great War tactics—the Eritreans dug trenches, and Ethiopian generals launched human-wave assaults—an estimated 80,000 people were killed. At least superficially, the war was utterly pointless: It concerned conflicting claims to a strategically insignificant border town called Badme, a place Wrong describes as "the kind of one-hotel, two-bar village in which yellow-eyed goats wandered through front rooms." Even more perverse, the war, like the Congolese conflict, pitted erstwhile allies against each other. Meles and Isaias had fought side by side to liberate Ethiopia from the brutal Stalinist regime that ruled it in the 1980s. After victory, Isaias had been rewarded with independence for Eritrea, formerly an Ethiopian province.

In her new book, *I Didn't Do It for You*, Wrong tells the story of how independent Eritrea came to be, and how it then came to disappoint. A British writer who has logged extensive time in Africa for the *Financial Times* and other publications, Wrong writes that she first gravitated to the country in 1996. Independence was new and spirits were running high. "Having gorged on gloomy headlines," she writes, "I was hungry for what seemed increasingly impossible: an African good news story." It was an admirable appetite, akin to the one that led Clinton to Africa in search of renaissance men. But in the end, as so often in Africa, Wrong's good news story proved too good to last.

Wrong's previous book, *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*, chronicled the final, rotten years of Mobutu's Congo, and for my money, it's one of the best journalistic accounts of contemporary Africa. Mobutu's dramatic overthrow inspired reams of overheated words, but *Mr. Kurtz* was different: It positively burst with lived experience. Wrong found political meaning in her encounters with legless street hawkers and Versace-donning nightclub dandies. In the book's tour-de-force introductory chapter, she described a post-overthrow visit to one of the ousted dictator's ransacked palaces, where she discovered that the kleptocrat's Ming vases were fake, and his signature cravats, which looked fabulous from a distance, were actually velcroed-on. "This emperor did have some clothes," she wrote. "But like his regime itself, they were all show and no substance."

So it was with some dismay that I opened *I Didn't Do It for You* to discover that its first chapter begins with the words, "Whenever I land in Asmara..." Her use of the hoary my-plane's-approach device is an early signal that this book will be different from *Mr. Kurtz*—a visitor's story. This is not to say that *I Didn't Do It for You* is a failure. It is an engaging read, and, as Wrong writes, it offers "a lasting

Andrew Rice has reported from Africa for The Nation, The New Republic *and other magazines. He is currently at work on a book about Uganda for Metropolitan.*

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cautionary tale" about how long-forgotten Great Power decisions—an unfair treaty here, a deal with a dictator there—can reverberate in unanticipated ways. "[This] is a book about betrayal, repeated across generations," she writes, "and how the expectation of betrayal can both create an extraordinary inner strength and distort a national psyche." In devastating detail, Wrong excavates the motivations and machinations of Eritrea's various self-interested overlords and shows how this small, determined nation learned to fight back, finally winning the thing it desired most: its freedom. But in the end, as perceptive as she is, Wrong can't quite explain her story's final, cruelest and most intriguing twist: how Eritrea came to betray itself.

Perceptive as she is, Wrong can't quite explain her story's final, cruelest and most intriguing twist: how Eritrea came to betray itself.

An arid, sun-baked land along the Red Sea, Eritrea has long been defined by those who possessed it. It was a province of the mighty Axumite empire, which dominated the Horn of Africa before the Middle Ages, a colony of Mussolini's Italy, which transformed the capital, Asmara, into an Art Deco showcase, and a prize for the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, who coveted its ports. During the cold war, the United States armed Selassie to fight Eritrea's Marxist separatists—the forebears of the country's present-day leaders—because the country offered an ideal place to intercept the radio transmissions of our enemies (and allies).

Wrong is at her best when recounting this history. She has a keen appreciation for the recurring irony of Africa: that the well-intentioned so often do the most harm. She exhumes obscure historical figures like the Italian politician Ferdinando Martini, a reformist at home who nonetheless presided over his country's consolidation of colonial power in Eritrea, and Sylvia Pankhurst, a British suffragette who helped liberate the country from Italian and later British rule, only to deliver it to a mendacious African, Selassie. Wrong has a particular eye for the husks these withered empires left behind: a desolate war cemetery filled with the dead of an arduous 1941 battle between the British and Italian armies; the old Fascist Party headquarters, now the country's Ministry of Education, "where a stone staircase bearing a wrought-iron motif of flaming torches"—the blackshirts' symbol—"rises grandly to the first floor."

She also tracks down some living relics of Eritrea's past. She visits John Spencer, Selassie's American lawyer, at a Long Island nursing home, and uses him as a vehicle to explain the back-room legerdemain that led to Eritrea's being ceded to Ethiopia after World War II. She interviews a group of retired American soldiers who worked at the military's top-secret base in Kagnew. By day, they manned the listening post. By night, they formed a clique called the "Gross Guys," drinking heavily and staging frat-house hijinks.

What's missing from this recitation of the history, which goes on for well over half the book, are any memorable Eritrean characters. This gap is understandable when it comes to the distant past—she notes that the Italians buried their Eritrean military conscripts under gravestones marked "Ascaro Ignoto," or "unknown soldier"—but less so when it comes to more recent events. It's also curious, since Wrong is convincing in describing her affection for the Eritrean people, who by her account are purposeful, hardened and severe, like the terrain on which they live. "By God, they were impressive," she writes in the opening chapter, describing initial encounters so uniform in their postindependence euphoria that she came to have "the uncanny feeling that I was speaking to the many mouths of one single, Hydra-headed creature: the Eritrean soul." One wishes, however, that Wrong had amplified a few more individual voices over the chorus of this oversoul.

The uniformity of opinion is hardly surprising, given that Eritrea has been a military dictatorship for its entire twelve-year existence. Regimes born of armed struggle are fundamentally different from other governments: Leaders who were willing to die to gain power rarely cede it willingly. Uganda's President Museveni, the elder statesman of Clinton's renaissance quartet, who has done many good things for his country, encapsulated this sentiment perfectly in a 2002 speech to his Parliament, in which he warned opponents about trying to challenge his rule through civil disobedience. "We are people in suits by day but in uniform at night. We fought a liberation war," he said. "Don't play around with freedom fighters."

Wrong, who is remorseless when it comes to the failings of the Italians, British and Ethiopians, is positively gushing in her depiction of Eritrea's freedom fighters, whom she likens to the Spartans of ancient Greece. Admittedly, they benefit from the comparison to their opponents. In 1974 Selassie was overthrown by a military junta known as the Derg. After some infighting, an army colonel named Mengistu Haile Mariam emerged as the Derg's leader. Elite Ethiopians scoffed at Mengistu's dark skin and diminutive stature, but the insecure dictator proved ruthlessly effective at eliminating enemies. When the Americans cut off aid, Mengistu embraced Communism—he capped one memorable rally by smashing a Coca-Cola bottle filled with blood—winning the favor, and the arms shipments, of the Soviet Union.

Mengistu's well-equipped army drove Eritrea's separatist rebels into an impenetrable mountainous region known as the Sahel. There, they hunkered down and trained, building an elaborate network of schools, hospitals and factories, which were often literally situated underground. Wrong describes this exilic period as a utopian moment: Uneducated villagers took literature classes in caves; a self-taught chef whipped lentils into delicacies; a rebel pianist played recitals under thorn trees, amid the bombs. Female fighters sported Afros, and their children, called "Red Flowers," were communally raised. The "absence of worldly distractions," Wrong writes, "encouraged a clarity of thought the meditating monks of Shangri-La would have recognized."

Strangely, Wrong does not tell us much about the leader of the "Movement," Isaias. She says that in her research for the book, she managed to interview Eritrea's reclusive president several times, yet she dispenses with a character sketch in a scant four pages, far less space than she devotes to describing the scatological derring-do of America's Gross Guys. She mentions in passing that during the time in the Sahel, opponents of Isaias were often "made to 'disappear' with typical Eritrean quietness." This is a worrisome harbinger, one that makes Wrong wonder whether the rebel experience "also contained the seeds of Eritrea at its worst."

But the point is not pursued—the enthusiastic oversoul was apparently not expansive on the subject of extrajudicial murders—and such troubling thoughts are not allowed to cloud Wrong's overall narrative, a tale of brave resistance. She contrasts the rebels with the debauched American servicemen who served in Kagnew, and asks, "Which life, given the choice, would I pick?" She answers, "Give me the

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Sahel any day, because the choice between blandness and passion seems no choice at all." She doesn't venture the logical next question, however. What society would she rather live in: one in which soldiers are subordinate to civilians, or one in which an all-powerful movement rules?

In 1991 the Soviet Union disintegrated, and Mengistu fell, worn down by the Eritrean rebels and an allied movement of highland Ethiopians led by Meles. Two years later, in a referendum, Eritreans voted overwhelmingly for independence. Isaias became president. This was the period during which Wrong first visited the country. In retrospect, she writes, this was to be "Eritrea's golden era, when everything seemed possible." She met newly minted government ministers who dropped references to Samuel Pepys and Charles Darwin. She heard that President Isaias, an ascetic fellow, was sometimes glimpsed doing his own shopping along Liberation Avenue.

Then came Badme. If the war with Ethiopia seemed senseless and spiteful, Wrong writes, this was largely because it was a family spat. Meles and Isaias had a similar ethnic background; they were even rumored to be blood relations. In the bush, Meles had been Isaias's protégé. But after the war, the dynamic changed. Meles ruled a far larger and more powerful country. "They were brothers, certainly, but a touchy younger brother can easily come to hate a patronizing older sibling," Wrong writes. (The relationship between Museveni and Kagame, incidentally, followed much the same trajectory.)

Eritrea marched to war with Spartan assurance. It retreated badly defeated. Thousands of soldiers perished, and with them any hope for democracy. Since 1998 Eritrea has degenerated into a paranoid hermit state. Opposition political parties are banned, as are gatherings of more than seven people. Dissenters are jailed. Internet cafes are watched. Foreign aid has dried up. Last year the government kicked out the BBC correspondent, the last Western journalist in town. Wrong reports that Isaias is often drunk, and has taken to head-butting underlings who dare utter a word of disagreement. Presumably, he doesn't do his own shopping anymore.

In her closing chapters, Wrong describes this changed country, which she compares to Ceausescu's Romania, and ventures an explanation for its decline. As usual, history is to blame. "If Eritrea today so often comes across as dangerously imperious to criticism and bafflingly quick to anger," Wrong writes, "she is largely that way because colonial masters and superpowers made her so." But this seems simplistic. Might there not be other factors at play—ones that implicate Eritrea's rulers themselves? Look at the wider trend. Seven years on, Clinton's soldier princes are looking increasingly like the stereotypical Big Men of Africa's past. The exception is Meles, whose Ethiopia is still considered a relative success. But Kagame's Rwanda is a police state. He finally submitted to an election in 2003, which he won with a credulity-stretching 95 percent of the vote. Museveni is now campaigning to remove term limits from Uganda's Constitution, which would allow him to stay in power indefinitely.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can say there's a lesson here, for American policy-makers and journalists alike: Don't fall for the allure of charismatic men of arms. The good news is that today we have options, for Africa looks a lot different now compared to the 1990s. Elections have become more common than coups. Democratic regimes, however imperfect, now rule countries like Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria. South Africa is growing into a regional power; the whole continent watches its television networks and uses its cell phones. These are not scintillating stories of life-or-death struggle, but that, on balance, is probably a good thing. Africa could stand a boring decade.

I shouldn't be so hard on *I Didn't Do It for You*. This is probably the best book that could be written about Eritrea, given its present state of repression. "I used to come away from Asmara with my notebooks scrawled with names and addresses; asking an Eritrean whether he minded speaking on the record almost felt like an insult," Wrong writes, mournfully. "Now acquaintances mutter under their breath, or suggest a drive to Durfo to watch the clouds swirling over the valleys. There, in the privacy of their cars, they open their hearts." Ever in search of the good news, Wrong is able to find hope in even these furtive exchanges, for now "the Hydra's heads often speak in whispers, but they wear different expressions, and none of the opinions they voice are the same.... Eritreans are becoming rounded individuals, their community a more complex, conflicted society. This is no bad thing."

If you're Eritrean, this is probably cold comfort. We can only hope that one day when things change, those people will still be around to speak in more than anonymous, plaintive whispers. Perhaps then they will tell us what dashed the hopes of those heady independence days. For now, however, we will have to content ourselves with this imperfect book, as we wait for a true renaissance to come. ■

Kindred Spirits

MARIA MARGARONIS

SPECIMEN DAYS.
By Michael Cunningham. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 308 pp. $25.

Walt Whitman made extravagant claims to immortality. Not content to rely on literary staying power, or on the capacity of repetition to make something seem true—"It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not. I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence"—he conceived his work as a body in which his spirit would live on. All flesh is grass; grass is "the beautiful uncut hair of graves"; and *Leaves of Grass* claims to be nothing less than Whitman's flesh made word: "thrusting me beneath your clothing,/Where I may feel the throbs of your heart or rest upon your hip,/Carry me when you go forth over land or sea..."

Whitman might seem to be an ideal subject for Michael Cunningham, who has long been preoccupied with where the dead go and how they live among us, with what persists about the human heart and with the afterlife of writers in their readers' minds. In his wonderful 1990 novel, *A Home at the End of the World*, two young men, once lovers, scarred by childhood losses, form a family with an older woman; the book traces the way memories of 1950s family life, and of its breakdown, haunt the shifting currents of sex and friendship on the bohemian fringes of 1980s New

Maria Margaronis writes from The Nation*'s London bureau.*

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York. Bobby, whose beloved older brother died as a young teenager, feels himself absent from his own life until he has a kitchen revelation of his brother's presence: "It came to me that death itself could be a more distant form of participation in the continuing history of the world. Death could be like this, a simultaneous presence and absence while your friends continued to chat among the lamps and furniture about someone who was no longer you."

In *The Hours*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1999, the past and the dead persist through a literary text, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, which haunts the lives of two women years after Woolf's death and the texture of Cunningham's prose: "Laura Brown is trying to lose herself. No, that's not it exactly—she is trying to keep herself by gaining entry into a parallel world.... Already her bedroom (no, *their* bedroom) feels more densely inhabited, more actual, because a character named Mrs. Dalloway is on her way to buy flowers." Part of the book's magic is that it is at once steeped in the sensibility and purposes of Woolf's work and surprisingly free of the imaginative limits such a project might impose—just as a reader, absorbed in a novel pored over on the subway or after the kids are in bed, might find it coloring but not controlling everything in her life. Like *The Master*, Colm Tóibín's recent fictional foray into the mind of Henry James, *The Hours* celebrates the secret intimacy of reader and writer. Influence bursts out of the literary closet, flaunting itself as the truest form of love; Laura checks into a hotel to read almost as guiltily as an adulteress.

Of course, *The Hours* is also a ghost story: *Mrs. Dalloway* threads through the lives of Laura in 1940s Los Angeles, Clarissa Vaughan in contemporary New York and Woolf herself, pregnant with the idea of suicide. *Specimen Days* is more directly concerned with the uncanny aspect of immortality. It, too, consists of three different stories under the sign of another writer, separated in this case by genre as well as long periods of time. The presiding spirit is Whitman, who gives the book its title and its epigraph, but at his elbow is the father of the macabre, Edgar Allan Poe. The first piece is a Gothic historical fantasy; the second a hard-boiled thriller set sometime after September 11; the third a science fiction tale in which New York has become a theme park where tourists pay to be mugged by "simulos." The stories are linked by the names of the three main characters, who may or may not be reincarnated from one story to the next—one of them, Luke or Lucas, is always a deformed, pale, pumpkin-headed child. They are also linked by *Leaves of Grass*, compulsively quoted by a character in each story who relies on it (as Bobby or Laura might) to supply some missing life force or human quality.

Both Woolf and Whitman were committed to the detailed recording of shifting impressions; both were bisexual. Otherwise, the sensitive Bloomsbury princess and the bearded son of Paumanok have little in common. If *The Hours* was written out of passionate affinity, *Specimen Days* feels more like a battle. Cunningham's flair for subtle forms of empathy is at odds with Whitman's ravenous need for self-expression and often gives way to the kind of pastiche he scrupulously avoided in *The Hours*, not so much of Whitman himself as of the genres *Specimen Days* so effortfully assumes. There are the usual lovely, incisive aphorisms and images—"here was his secret self, that tiny, harmed, indignant quality she sensed in him"; "Under the hats were bracelets and earrings, arranged on a swatch of faded blue velvet, gleaming like brave little gestures of defeat"; "He loved himself for loving his father. It was the best he could do"—but the novel feels forced and fragmented, lacking a whole imaginative hinterland. Each paragraph seems to be conjured from the air rather than grown from roots under the surface of the book.

But as a piece of cultural criticism, an imaginative encounter with the dark side of America's utopian dreams, *Specimen Days* is rich and original. Cunningham's Whitman—as the academic Rita Dunn explains in the book's middle section—is a protean, amoral figure, "a dervish of sorts," "writing the poem that *was* the United States...at the end of the agrarian world and the beginning of the mechanized one." (He is an altogether more frightening character than the Whitman Allen Ginsberg met some fifty years ago in a supermarket in California, "poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys"; times have changed.) And Cunningham's struggle with the poet's seductive power brings him face to face with the violence of expansive individualism, the brutal marriage of capitalism and technology, the death wish hidden in omnipotent fantasies of oneness with the universe: "to die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier." These preoccupations remain alive and unresolved through most of the book; they are, as Cunningham might say, its soul.

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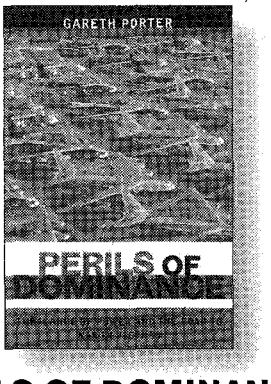

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century New York. Cunningham has given himself a hollowed-out vessel of a protagonist who has Whitman's receptivity but not his ego or creative force: "He went briefly into the stone. He was cold and sparkling, immutable, glad to be walked on." Lucas works well as a screen on which we can see his world projected, less so as a vehicle for narrative drive or a container for Cunningham's consciousness. All around him, life is being taken over by machinery and commerce: "A cart rolled by with a golden landscape painted on its side: two cows grazing among stunted trees and a third cow looking up at the name of a dairy, which floated in the golden sky." His father has been "turned to leather by his years in the tannery," his dark eyes "set like jewels"; a machine does his breathing for him. The city itself is an incomprehensible machine. And his brother Simon has been crushed to death by a die stamper at the works, which Lucas now goes to operate.

Cunningham beautifully imagines how machines must have seemed to those who handled them in the early days: "It wore its wheel as a snail wears its shell, with a languid and inscrutable pride.... The machine was at once formidable and tender-looking. It offered its belt like a tentative promise of kindness." It isn't long before Lucas starts to hear his brother's voice inside the steel—literally the "ghost in the machine": "Simon's flesh had been stamped and expelled, but his invisible part remained, trapped among the gears and teeth." Terrified, Lucas sets out to keep the dead from summoning the living into the machine world ("just as everyone had left Ireland to come to New York"), especially his brother's fiancée, Catherine. The way he does this draws on Whitman's writings from the Civil War, of blood and bandages and amputations; but it is not quite enough. The story ends with a reimagining of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, which killed 146 young workers, filtered through the memory of September 11:

> The woman stood in the window, holding to its frame.... The square of brilliant orange made of her a blue silhouette, fragile and precise.... She turned her head to look back into the room, as if someone had called to her.... She jumped.... The air had a taste. Lucas rolled it in his mouth. He recognized it. The dead had entered the atmosphere."

Whitman himself is present, the quintessential journalist, taking it all in without judgment, discrimination or pity: "Was that Walt, far off, among the others, Walt with his expression of astonished hunger for everything that could occur?"

"In the Machine" reads Whitman's insistence on immortality and connectedness ("For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you") through the fragility of life in working-class New York, and finds in it both seductiveness and a form of indifference. In Central Park, at night, Lucas longs to be one with the stars and the grass: "What he'd thought of as his emptiness, his absence of soul, was only a yearning for this." He and Catherine are already "members of the dead"; what does it matter if they participate in the universe as workers or as atoms of the grass? In the way of all who advocate transcendence, America's great radical poet also turns out to be an apologist for the status quo.

Cunningham connects Walt Whitman's vision to a thirst for death, and to an idea of martyrdom Americans tend to regard as alien.

So far so familiar. But Cunningham goes a step further, connecting Whitman's vision to a thirst for death, and to an idea of martyrdom Americans tend to regard as alien, a product of Islam. Here are the thoughts of a woman consumed by the flames: "We were weary and put-upon, we lived in tiny rooms, we ate candy in secret, but now we are radiant and glorious.... We are part of something vaster and more glorious than the living can imagine.... God is a holy machine that loves us so fiercely, so perfectly, he devours us, all of us. It is what we're here for, to be loved and eaten." In the second story, "The Children's Crusade," *Leaves of Grass* becomes the bible of a millenarian cult of child suicide bombers: "They prepare for death, yet are they not the finish.... Whom they take into space to behold the birth of stars." Cat, the police psychologist investigating the explosions, imagines a child who is essentially Lucas from "In the Machine": "passive and fearful, strangely empty, infinitely suggestible; an 'as if' personality, one of those mysterious beings who lack some core of self everyone else takes for granted...a convincing member of the dead."

"The Children's Crusade" is a gripping, suspenseful story, the only one that offers a tight plot and a reflective central character. Even so, Cat is a cliché, the classic black female sleuth, tough yet vulnerable, deflecting everyday racism with practiced skill ("the queenly bearing and the schoolmarm diction, the smiling ultraformality")—until she comes face to face with one of the children, another Luke channeling Whitman in place of his own thoughts, and the Gordian knot of victimhood and violence is suddenly made vivid: "Cat was seized by a spasm of dreadful compassion. Here was a monster; here was a frightened child. Here was a tortured little boy who could at any moment blow them both away."

Cunningham writes movingly about the everyday life of mothers and little boys, and his faithfulness to that experience saves the story from petrifying into a didactic fable about terrorism. Cat rescues the child, makes him an omelet, puts him to sleep in her bed. Knowing that he may still try to kill her, she decides that she's prepared to take the risk and go on the run with him: "he might not, after all, be waiting to do it with a bread knife or a pillow as she slept; he might be willing to do it gradually, as children had been doing since time began." The ending, with this final echo of Oscar Wilde's "Ballad of Reading Gaol," transposes Whitman's grand visions of death and rebirth into a domestic mode where we can connect with their pathos as well as their indifference. The children's crusade can also be understood as a sped-up version of each generation's supplanting by the next, from which "no one is safe, not even mothers."

Sadly, all this subtlety goes missing in the last story, "Like Beauty," a truly hokey piece of science fiction of the sort that conjures a future world through products and brand names—serotoninade, dermaslough, children called Tomcruise and Katemoss. The protagonist this time is a Pinocchio figure, an experimental "biomechanical" implanted with a Whitman chip and troubled by the first stirrings of something like a soul. On the run with a reptilian alien called Catareen, he eventually meets his maker, Emory Lowell ("I wanted to give you some moral sense as well.... I thought that if you were programmed with the work of great poets, you'd be better able to appreciate the consequences of your actions"), who is setting out with his family on a thirty-eight-year journey to a planet they call Paumanok. Simon the simulo attains humanity through the sorrow attendant on love, but the reader learns nothing new. The pat science-fiction puzzle about what it would take to give a machine a soul is a cartoon version of the first story's imaginative engagement with technology ("And the narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery") and trivializes the book's exploration of what it means to have immortal longings.

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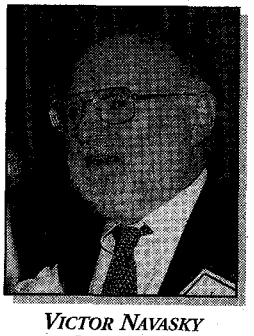

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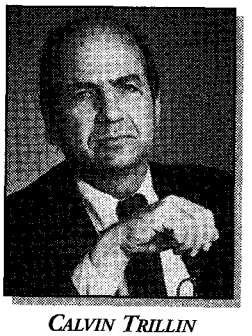

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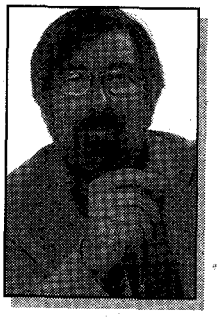

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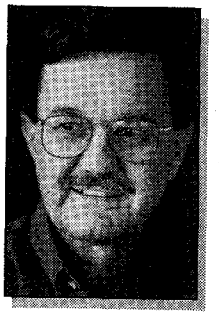

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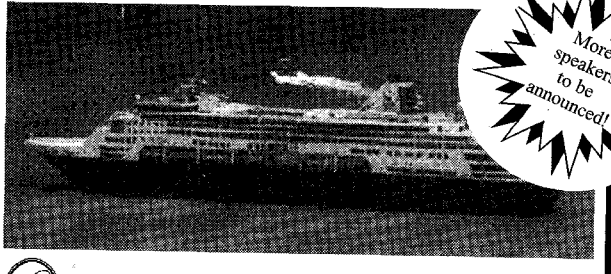

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What went wrong here for this immensely gifted and sympathetic writer? Winning the Pulitzer ought to allow a novelist to go out on a limb, and Cunningham took a brave risk in moving away from the beautiful, prismatic prose with which he made his name. Unfortunately he's also left behind the careful human insights that build so lightly and so satisfyingly through his earlier work. Instead he's tried to combine two fashionable and inimical devices, the novel reimagining the work of another writer and the genre potpourri; in the end the machinery overwhelms the soul. But *Specimen Days* is haunting nonetheless. Quietly but insistently, it frames September 11 not through the lens of personal tragedy or as a break in history but as an episode in the ongoing life of a culture, with resonances in the past as well as implications for the future. The vulnerable child with fantasies of omnipotence; the dream of an apocalyptic moment that can change the world; ecstasy's indifference to the needs of others; the murderous potential of machinery—like all the truest ghosts, these things are frightening because they are so familiar. ■

Look at Me

LEE SIEGEL

BREAK, BLOW, BURN: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-Three of the World's Best Poems.
By Camille Paglia. Pantheon. 247 pp. $20.

When Camille Paglia first strutted onto the scene in 1991 with her polemical tome *Sexual Personae*, her smart, audacious duels with orthodoxy and militancy on both the left and the right were a tonic. Against highly theoretical academic feminists comfortable in their privileged aeries, she cited the experience of working-class women, and also just plain, ordinary struggling women who were unprotected by tenure and by the sealed borders of a campus. In response to the conservatives who sought to woo her, she flaunted her bisexuality and her love of gay style and camp. In response to the multiculturalists who dreamed of bringing into the "canon" comic books and television sitcoms—thus making it possible for comic books and television to also bear the stigma of "homework"—she defended the virtues of classic literature. But when the conservatives came calling again with their Great Books boosterism, she blasted them with her ardor for rock and roll.

Feminist martinets? Paglia zapped them with paeans to pornography, prostitution and the thrill of raw, heterosexual sex. Conservative prigs? She zinged them with hymns to Robert Mapplethorpe and to gay male porn, and to the superiority of gay male sex. Lesbians? Well, she didn't really like them, but she loved having sex with women, just in case you underestimated her antagonism toward the idea of "normalcy." And so it went.

Like all styles of radical will, it eventually got tiresome. "Attacking the stale orthodoxies of both left and right" has itself become a stale intellectual franchise, a contrarian orthodoxy. You can be left, and you can be (I guess) right without being stalely orthodox. The "issues" Paglia was railing against were a lot less well defined beyond the parochial realm in which she debated them. Campus campaigns against free speech, a university's attempts to police the nebulous zone of sex and dating—such trends seemed sensationally oppressive inside the claustrophobic space of the university, and in the hungry eyes of op-ed page editors, book publishers and television producers.

But standing outside the university and looking in yielded a different perspective. People, especially young people, really were feeling more vulnerable. Self-esteem really was a vital psychic quality worth talking about. Society was changing. Commercially fabricated permissiveness was not the same thing as genuine human freedom, and people hadn't yet developed—we still haven't—new defenses against new types of injury created by the marketplace. So younger people were looking for new ideas and new sentiments that would help them become persons, or simply to help them survive. Naturally there were going to be outrageous excesses, careerist hangers-on, charismatic charlatans along the way. That's the price of progress.

Considered in this broader social context, Paglia's Emersonian pronouncements on the inestimable value of the individual began to sound as adolescent as Emerson at his most solipsistic. And celebrity started exacting its usual toll on Paglia in the form of self-exaggeration and self-parody. The thoughtful gadfly became a performing gabfly; her provocations declined into insults; her once-gratifying affirmations of individuality, imagination and incalculable experience began to sound like playground shouts of Look at Me. Paglia's vituperative ranting against hate-speech laws now seemed like arguments for why they should exist. She seemed to be precisely the kind of old-fashioned bully who had given rise to the new fragility and its search for protection, and for its own sources of power.

Worst of all was Paglia's self-consciousness as a media personality. After a while, she was no longer taking positions in response to principles or ideas, but in response to her own positions. Her extreme rhetoric concealed a cautious tailoring of her image. For every step leftward, she had to take a step rightward; for every transgressive gesture she had to make a concession to middle-class mores, for every step down to pop culture, she had to step up to some exaltation of artistic greatness. It was like doing the last tango in Paris all by yourself, on *The Charlie Rose Show*. Shaped by the issues, Paglia reached the point where she could only express herself in the categorical language of the issues. As the issues that launched her career as a public intellectual gave way to different ones that were outside her arena of expertise, she receded from public view.

Until now. With her new book, Paglia has found a new emergency in American life. As if an unnecessary war, a sinking economy, a widening gulf between classes, a rampant commercialism like acid on the brain weren't bad enough, America is now experiencing a crisis in... poetry. Resurrecting the patented alarmist language of Allan Bloom and all those culture warriors who marched across our television screens in the late 1980s and '90s—and in doing so created a cultural distraction while the right wing stole American politics—Paglia has exhumed a dead herring. She declares that "poetry was at the height of prestige in the 1960s. American college students were listening to rock music but also writing poetry." She attended lots of poetry readings back then. However, "over the following decades, poetry and poetry study were steadily marginalized by pretentious 'theory.'"

Now Paglia finds "too much work by

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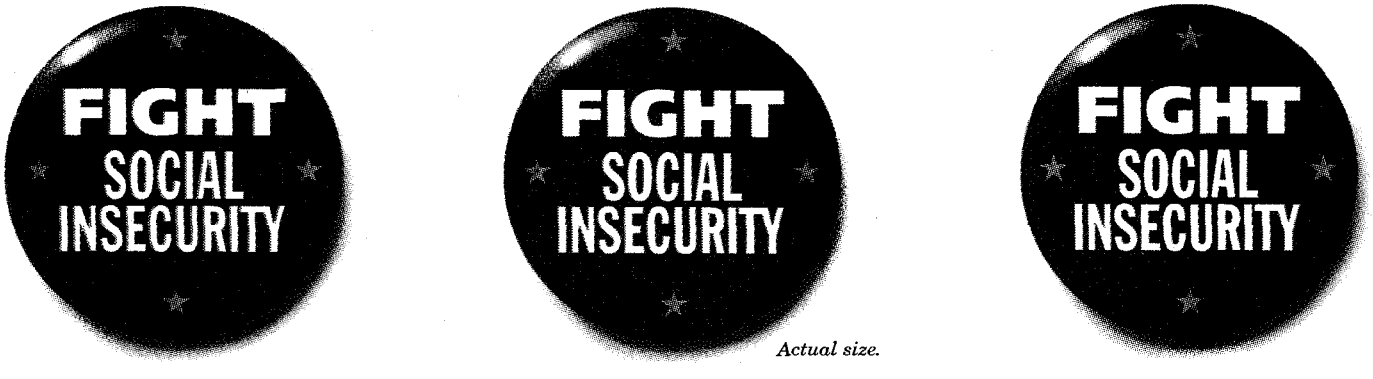

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the most acclaimed poets labored, affected, and verbose, intended not to communicate with the general audience but to impress their fellow poets. Poetic language has become stale and derivative." She is "shocked at how weak *individual* poems have become over the past forty years." Poets today "have lost ambition and no longer believe they can or should speak for their era." This situation is particularly dire because "at this time of foreboding about the future of Western culture, it is crucial to identify and preserve our finest artifacts." And you thought only our "democracy" was under attack! No, they want our Norton anthologies, too. If they hit us again, how shall we fight them, now that our poetic language has become "stale and derivative"? Of what use against their bombs will our sagging synecdoches be? If only Grumman made fresh metaphors, too...

The best way to think about an alarmist book like this one is, first, to try to figure out who might want to read it. The only people who truly care about the fate of poetry are the small, rarefied group of devotees who write and/or avidly read poetry. Needless to say, they are not Paglia's audience, since the last thing that would attract their interest—or their respect—is an elementary, and exceedingly banal, primer on how to read a handful of poems from the distant to the recent past. And how such reading exercises would help genuine poets replenish their language defies comprehension.

Writers and lovers of poetry would be aware, too, that the situation Paglia is describing is a figment of her publicity-deprived imagination. For one thing, her golden age of the 1960s, far more than our own moment, shook with mandarin anxiety that poetry, and high culture in general, was being snuffed out by the counterculture. For another, if a "crisis" exists in poetry, it's the same trying circumstances that prevail in the world of art in general. We live in a prosperous society that offers plenty of free time for the coddled children of the middle and upper-middle class (and beyond), a society where there are more college-educated people than at any time in modern history. And so there are now more people than at any time in human history who are, understandably, seeking to escape the primordial curse of uncreative human labor by—usually thanks to their parents' financial support—trying to make various kinds of art.

The result is an expanded market, a huge inflation of artistic output, and a sharp intensification of competition. There are probably no fewer worthwhile poems, novels and paintings now being made by gifted people than there ever were. But there's a vast increase in desperate, ego-driven shit, of which Paglia's book happens to be a good example. Overproduction makes it harder for good work to get noticed, and thus harder to find. And because the old aesthetic criteria have been relativized—or marginalized—by new conditions that we can barely understand or articulate, it's also more difficult to recognize real art when we do see it.

Once a defender of art against ideology, Paglia drags almost every poem in her new book into the realm of noisy, issue-driven debate.

If Paglia's book isn't for anyone who has a stake in the future of poetry, who is it for? It's for educated people who want to feel better about not being as interested in poetry as they've been told educated people should be. Paglia belongs to that group of critics who learned long ago how to satisfy the vanity of smart, culturally credentialed people who either no longer have the time to read or who, for one reason or another, are not drawn to high culture—in this case, poetry. You tell such people in wry, ironic, cultured tones that there's no longer anything worth reading. In this way, you reassure them that the classics they read in college, and perhaps graduate school, are all they need to know. You inform them of all this under the aspect of a "crisis." That way, you give them an occasion to substitute moral indignation for intellectual absorption; you enable them to indulge the illusion of experiencing an "issue" of high culture as though they were experiencing the real thing. America must be the only country in the world where moral indignation has become an established intellectual style.

The irony of *Break, Blow, Burn* is that Paglia, the great defender of art against ideology and against tendentious multicultural agendas, drags just about every poem in this book—from Shakespeare's sonnets to Joni Mitchell's "Woodstock," a poem of sorts—into the realm of noisy, issue-driven debate. No wonder Auden is inexcusably absent from this slim selection. He famously wrote that "poetry makes nothing happen." Paglia, by contrast, seems to think of poetry as a higher form of punditry, exhorting poets to "remember their calling and take stage again." But she's confusing her fantasy of poetry's purpose with her own purpose in publishing this book, which is to re-create the kind of controversy that made her a celebrity. Nearly all the poems she's chosen are sonnets or lyric poems. Neither sonnets nor lyric poems are meant to speak for their era. Few poets feel obligated to do so in any form.

But Paglia has to make her poets sound as big, world-historical and urgent as she herself aspires to be. One consequence of this willfulness is to make Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley sound like *The McLaughlin Group*. The other is to offer horrible, bombastic misreadings of the poems Paglia has chosen. Shelley's "Ozymandias," about the broken ruins of a tyrant's monument to his power, "wipes out history and humanity in a godless apocalypse that prefigures modern nihilism." Cool. But in fact, Shelley was an optimist who wrote poems suffused with faith in human progress. That's not a matter of perspective but a verifiable biographical fact borne out by everything Shelley ever wrote. "Ozymandias" is about the vanity of power, especially abusive power. That nothing remains, in the sands of time, of the "sneer of cold command" on the dictator's sculpted face is cause for hope, not nihilistic despair.

In her quest for relevance and urgency (an impulse she oddly shares with the student radicals she once berated for wanting to read contemporary black authors instead of "dead white males"), Paglia loads onto her readings the kind of submarine-sandwich-like Big Ideas with which college freshmen pad the final-exam essays they never studied for. In *Break, Blow, Burn*, these are often the same ideas applied to very different poets. William Carlos Williams's tiny gem "The Red Wheelbarrow," she says, "represents a stable agrarian society that was already slipping away when the poem was written." Theodore Roethke's "Cuttings" "is a regrounding of modern English poetry in lost agrarian universals." Wordsworth was responding to "the go-go commercialism of industrial England." Decades later, and across the ocean, Whitman was responding to "a go-go era of industrialization." From the farm to the factory—going, going...go-go!

With Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," Paglia outdoes herself. This stunningly powerful but small lyric poem—its subject is Zeus's violation and impregnation of a mortal girl to whom he appears in the form of a swan—"can justifiably be considered the greatest poem of the twentieth century." If that's not enough to make you never want to read it, Paglia projects

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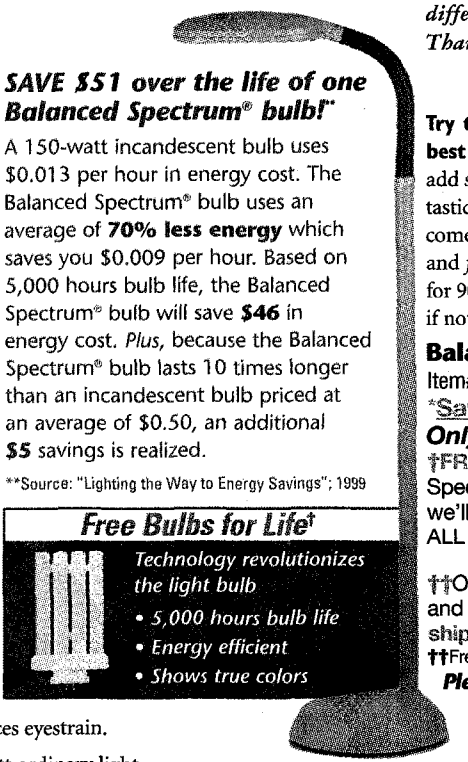

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onto Yeats her own pundit ambitions. She makes him sound like an editorial writer. "In Yeats' version [of the myth], womanizing is not a titillating sport but a ruthless expression of the will to power." But Yeats describes the omnipotent swan in exalted terms: His phallus is a "feathered glory"; his aspect a "white rush"; the poet wonders whether the girl can feel "the strange heart beating."

Could Paglia, the great scourge of feminist literature professors, be trying to attract precisely their constituency, who, after all, are committed buyers of books that speak to their political concerns? Or is she simply appealing to the masses of easily titillated college kids: "male swans (cobs) do have a small retractable penis." Titillation is one of Paglia's trustiest tools. Consider the passage she reproduces from *Hamlet*, in which Hamlet's father's ghost describes his murder at the hands of his brother, Claudius—a passage that Paglia includes as a self-contained poem, in this way confusing a poem's complete consciousness with a playwright's contrivance of consciousness in the form of character. For Paglia, what's really going on between the ghost and his treacherous sibling is an incestuous "male-on-male rape." Paglia likes to kick up a stir with the word "rape." John Donne believed, she proclaims, that "we will never be pure until we are abducted and raped by God." In Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" the "worms" that the poet imagines will accost his beloved when she is dead and buried are, in Paglia's reading, "gang rapists."

There is a sort of ingenious pandering in this book, a pandering alarmism. It's on flagrant display not just in Paglia's crudely forced sexual analogies, or in her post-9/11 lingo (in "To His Coy Mistress" "the poet turns terrorist"). It's in the way she keeps comparing her poems to movies as if to a higher mode of creative expression, thus reassuring readers that not only can they relax about their lack of interest in poetry, they can also stop feeling guilty about spending more time in front of the tube or the silver screen than with a "great" poem. For Paglia, it seems that the ultimate praise for the poems she's chosen is that they are either precursors to film, or filmlike. "Shakespeare's mobile eye prefigures the camera." Shakespeare's "Gothic" style "would in turn engender modern horror films." Marvell's poem is "a vivid, cinematic fantasy." "Ozymandias" is "prophetically cinematic." (But, then, Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 is "prophetically avant-garde.") Not only that, but "Shelley's technique resembles that of the motion picture camera." Yeats's "Second Coming" has an "effect...as cinematic as a silent film," and its conclusion is a "horror movie finale." Plath's "Daddy" "is a rollicking nursery rhyme recast as a horror movie."

To invoke two other writers from the past, Paglia used to come on like Byron; now she is like some cynical version of Dickens's Oliver Twist, trampling on her very own standards, stooping as low as she can go in order to get a second helping of attention from the public that has forgotten her. But bullies always end up being reduced to their inner weakling. It's called poetic justice. ■

Hail Mary

VIVIAN GORNICK

VINDICATION: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft.
By Lyndall Gordon. HarperCollins. 562 pp. $29.95.

Many, if not most, children exhibit an early talent for art or science, even intellection; but we can never accurately predict the one whose youthful giftedness will blossom not into a pastime but into a driving need: the kind of need that determines the course of one's life. Radicalism, too, is a talent that proves formative rather than casual. In creative work, the driving need occurs when the talent is exercised, the possessor of it finds that she or he is struck to the heart (not a thing that happens simply because one has talent) and a sense of expressive existence flares into bright life. That experience is incomparable: to feel not simply alive, but expressive. It induces a conviction of inner clarity that quickly becomes the very thing one can no longer do without. If it can be done without, it usually is. Those destined for a life of professional radicalism experience themselves in exactly the same way as does the artist or scientist who reaches center through the practice of the gift. No reward of life—neither love nor fame nor wealth—can compete. It is to this clarity of inner being that the radical—like the artist, the scientist, the philosopher—becomes attached, even addicted.

Mary Wollstonecraft, who, as the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1792, is known to us as the first modern feminist, is better described as an Enlightenment thinker whose life embodied the spirit of her age, and was exactly the kind of talented radical I've been talking about.

She was born in London in 1759, into a large shabby-genteel family that soon began moving from one failed farming venture to another, circling as far out as Yorkshire and Wales, and as close in as the villages that surrounded the city. The father drank, raged and wasted their money; the mother grew cold and remote. Deprived of both stability and affection, Mary was nonetheless left free to roam the open countryside with her brothers, read whatever came her way and discover without interference some of the basic elements of her own personality. At 15, she wrote to a friend who'd disappointed her, "I am a little singular in my thoughts of love and friendship; I must have the first place or none. I own your behavior is more according to the opinion of the world...[but] I have a heart that scorns disguise, and a countenance which will not dissemble."

It was all in place that early: the impassioned temperament, the remarkable articulateness, the strong intelligence, the defensive *hauteur*.

She was to pronounce grandly, later in life, that "genius will educate itself" and, indeed, bit by bit, she used whatever came her way to discover that she could think vividly for herself. When at 18—the family was now in desperate straits—she became companion to a rich old woman in upper-register Bath, she wrote home, "In the fine Lady how few traits do we observe of those affections which dignify human nature!" She also wrote, "A young mind looks round for love and friendship, but love and friendship fly from poverty.... The mind must then accommodate itself to its new state, or dare to be unhappy." *Dare to be unhappy*. Then, as ever, active unhappiness was preferable to the humili-

Vivian Gornick's new book, The Solitude of Self: Thinking About Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *will be published in September by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.*

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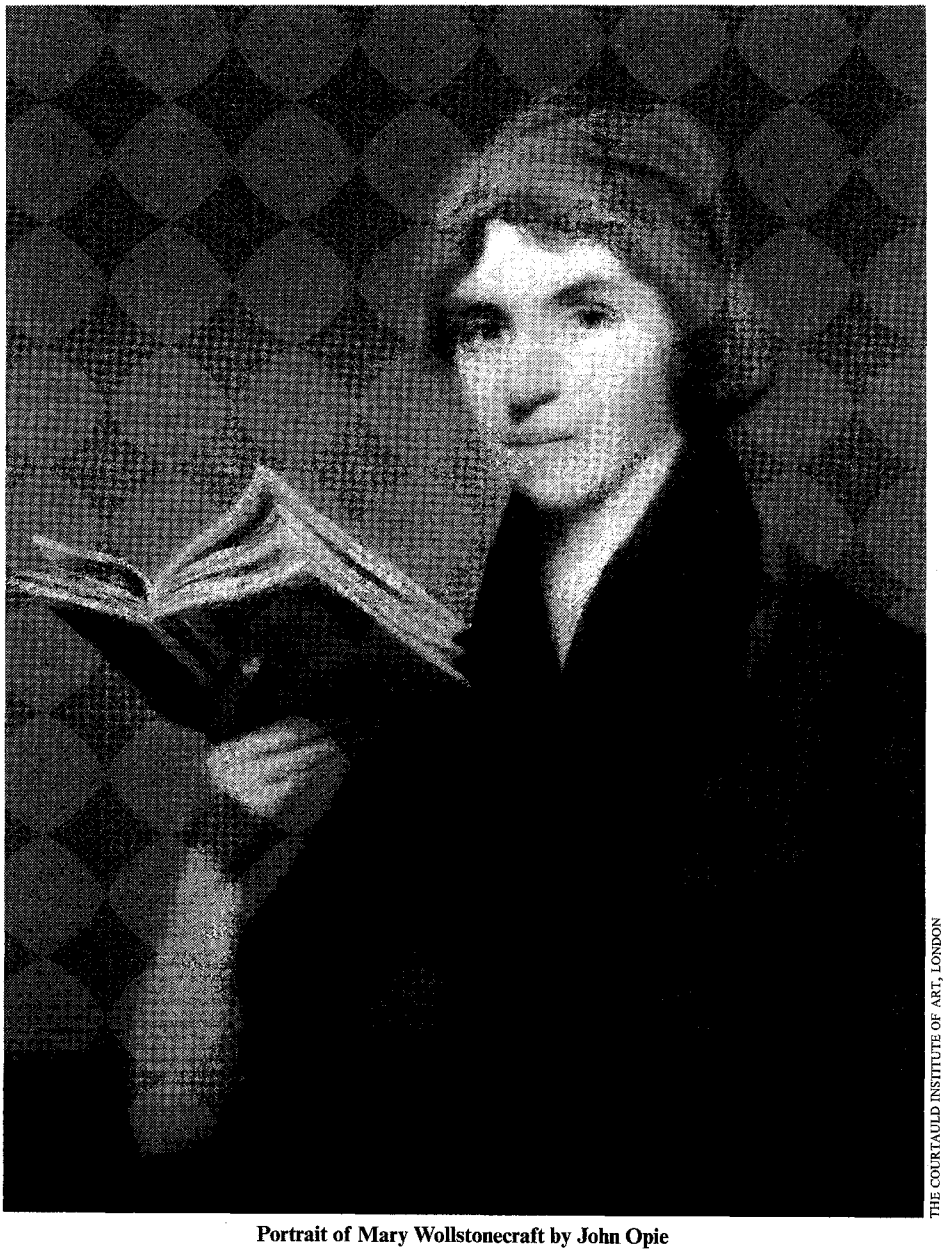
ation of passive accommodation.

At 25—with her mother dead and the family dispersed—Mary founded a school with her two sisters in a village two miles north of London that was home to a community of Dissenters. Here, two important developments occurred. She learned to teach, an experience that would profoundly influence her political philosophy; and she met Richard Price, the Dissenting preacher who clarified in her the passion for equality that came, in time, to dominate the whole of her radical thought. Price was an outspoken champion of the American Revolution, but he criticized the colonists mercilessly for having drawn up a Constitution that condoned slavery and deprived women of suffrage. Out of these ardent objections, there grew in Wollstonecraft a lifelong hatred of ranked power.

When the school fell on hard times, a friend among the Dissenters suggested that she write a book. She came up with a proposal—*Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*—that was taken to a progressive printer, Joseph Johnson, publisher of Benjamin Franklin and Tom Paine, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Johnson accepted Mary's proposal, and advanced her a munificent ten guineas. She set to work and found herself writing, "Whenever a child asks a question, it should always have a reasonable answer given it." No sooner had she set pen to paper than she began to think about human beings who happen to be women primarily as creatures who will respond to reason.

Let's stop here for a moment to appreciate the originality of Wollstonecraft's approach to education for women. The 1780s—with the American Revolution under way and the French about to break out—was a time of great reform excitement in England. Inevitably, in such an atmosphere the talk of change extended itself to improvement in the lot of women—revision of the property laws, or the grounds for separation or divorce, or more learning in the schools that simply prepared girls for marriage. No one challenged the prevailing notion that separate spheres of life were dictated by nature for women and for men. The typical reformer argued that more education for women would convert into a greater social good because knowledge would make women exert a civilizing influence on the men who were to become the responsible citizens. Wollstonecraft's writing—from the get-go—urged education for women not for its instrumental value but because it spoke to a basic human need. It was, she argued, in the nature of things that, in order to experience oneself, each and every human being must be taught to think. The development of reason, she would ultimately assert, allows us to control our passions, and it is this control that makes a human being human. For Wollstonecraft, it was not so much a matter of claiming rights for women as of identifying the irreducible characteristics of every creature capable of coming to consciousness.



THE COURTAULD INSTITUTE OF ART, LONDON

Portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft by John Opie

This argument is the beginning of modern radical feminism. It requires a philosophical view to observe, *All that men need in order to feel human women need too*. In 1792 the argument set Wollstonecraft apart from all others writing about women; as it did Elizabeth Cady Stanton fifty years later in America; Simone de Beauvoir a hundred years after that in France; and countless, nameless others in the 1970s when, during the second great wave of feminism, conservative feminists said, "Equal pay for equal work" and radical feminists said, "No, it goes deeper than that."

When the school finally failed, Mary did the other thing that women in her position did: She became a governess. The job took her to an ultra-rich family of the Protestant Ascendancy living in a castle in Ireland. Here, she discovered how far her inner experience had already taken her. Her employer, Lady Kingsborough, amazed by the intellectually minded governess living under her roof, showed her off to guests as an exotic. Mary—lonely, moody, humorless—was mortally offended, and withdrew as far as she dared into proud isolation.

"It's at this moment," writes her latest

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biographer, Lyndall Gordon, in *Vindication: A Life of Mary Wollstonecraft*, "that we catch [her] in the act of greatness." Sunk in the misery of demoralizing circumstances, she yet had the character to go on reading Rousseau late at night in her room, taking notes on a multitude of ideas she could not bring under control, making plans for future writing and giving herself the courage of youthful aggrandizement. In her journal she wrote, "To make any great advance in morality genius is necessary...a peculiar kind of genius which is not to be described and cannot be conceived by those who do not possess it." She was 27 years old.

The Kingsboroughs dismissed her, and instead of returning to her sisters, she now decided that she would try to live by her pen. Straight to London then, to Joseph Johnson, who took her in, found her a place to live, gave her work on his magazine, *The Analytical Review*, and introduced her to the set of English radical thinkers—among them William Godwin and Tom Paine—who gathered almost nightly at his table to talk politics, literature and philosophy. She was the only woman to join them. If it had been up to the men, she wouldn't have been there. It is to Johnson and Johnson alone that we owe the worldly advancement of Mary Wollstonecraft. Quite simply: he cherished her.

"What did Wollstonecraft do when dinner was over?" Gordon writes. "Johnson's dinners were at five in the afternoon. Did she linger after dark? Did any of the company see her home in a coach? It's unlikely: Mary did not invite gallantry.... [She] may best be seen as she saw herself, a 'solitary walker', unafraid of footpads in the shadows...[an] independent young woman wrapped in her cloak slips into the darkness, taking her way" across Blackfriars Bridge back to the street where she roomed. This was, in fact, the very best time of her life: orderly years of good hard work, with time enough, money enough, friendship enough—enough!—to begin to occupy her own mind fully.

When the French Revolution erupted in July 1789, English radicals were beside themselves with joy and hope, and all wrote openly in support of the rebellion. Then, in 1790, came Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, deploring the chaos into which the revolution had plunged the civilized world. Wollstonecraft responded instantly with an impassioned rebuttal she called *A Vindication of the Rights of Man*. The book would quickly be eclipsed by Tom Paine's more famous reply, but for Wollstonecraft it proved a catalytic exercise. Within the year, it had occurred to her to make a separate case for the inclusion of her own sex in the universal egalitarianism now being sought by so many on both sides of the English Channel.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was written at white heat in six weeks. The book did not sell more than 3,000 copies (as opposed to Paine's *Rights of Man*, which by 1793 had sold 200,000), but overnight it made Wollstonecraft famous, and infamous, throughout Europe and America. Radical to the core, it is one long, uninterrupted argument that the inequality of women, at every level of moral and spiritual life, is attributable to the meanness and stupidity of encouraging passion instead of reason in young girls, as an identity and a way of life.

Wollstonecraft's manifesto sold just a few thousand copies in its day, but it made her a star—and gave birth to modern feminism.

"The first object of laudable ambition," Wollstonecraft insists, "is to obtain a character as a human being"—a thing made possible only by the independence that comes with thinking for oneself. Raising women to inspire love rather than cultivate intelligence is, in fact, a losing game for all concerned because "when the freshness of youth is worn off, [their] artless graces become studied airs, and disgust every person of taste.... We then wish to converse not to fondle." In the book's most exciting chapter, she writes of the influence on reasoning power exerted by an early exposure to ideas. Here we have Mary herself reasoning, and it is a pleasure to feel her great love of the very thing she preaches, and to see how fine an example she herself sets of the very skill she wants to see every woman possess. As it is angry, repetitious and immoderate, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is a magnificent obsession; but as it is a work of large and compelling intelligence, it is moving and masterful.

High on her own celebrity, and at the same time feeling mentally and physically depleted, Wollstonecraft now decided to go to France to form, as she said, "a just opinion of the most extraordinary event that has ever been recorded"—and walked straight into the beginning of the Terror. She arrived in Paris in December 1792. On January 21 of the new year the king was guillotined before a crowd of 80,000. In no time at all thirty people a day were being guillotined; as Wordsworth put it, there were "never heads enough for those that bade them fall."

Terrified, heartsick, disoriented, she huddled with other expat English radicals who, each day anew, asked themselves, "Should I stay, should I go?" Because she stayed, in the spring of 1793 she met Gilbert Imlay, an opportunist extraordinaire who claimed to have been a captain in the American Revolutionary army. No one will ever know exactly what Imlay was up to in Paris in those years except that he was looking to make his fortune, but it seems to have been a little of everything: hatching lucrative political schemes, running guns or supplies (Austria and Prussia were now at war with France), selling the confiscated goods of those who'd gone to the guillotine.

Imlay was handsome, sexy, amoral; and he talked revolution, equality, free love with as much excitement as did Mary herself. It didn't take much. She was a 34-year-old idealistic virgin of untapped sensuality and untested principles. Like every other high-minded woman with no real experience, once she had fallen into the first overwhelming attraction of her life she needed to believe not only in her lover's integrity (in this case nonexistent) but in the lasting purity of their free union. This need—especially after she had borne Imlay a child—undid her. Within months of the baby's birth (during her pregnancy, by the way, she wrote and sent back to London her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution*), Imlay began to drift, his mind already on the next sexual adventure.

Mary was stunned—she could not believe that he no longer loved her—and, confused and humiliated, hung on like a bulldog. In the end, she stormed, begged, berated and groveled; made scenes in public and tried to kill herself. For these severe breaches of both social propriety and principled consistency—a "creature of reason" indeed—both she and her work were vilified for 200 years to come. Feminists of every generation read her books in secret but, until the twentieth century, could not make open use of her incomparable contribution to their cause.

To some degree the radicalism for which she had so great a talent lay more in what she lived than in what she wrote. She had in all innocence walked into the uncharted territory where ideology encounters experience, and plunged headlong into the valley of discrepancy between theory and

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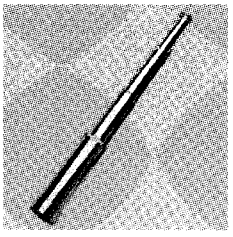

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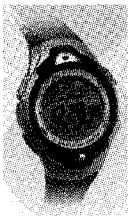

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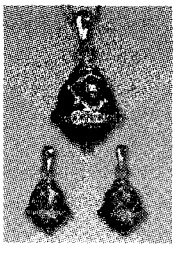

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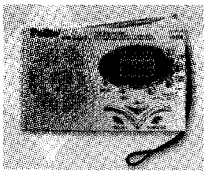

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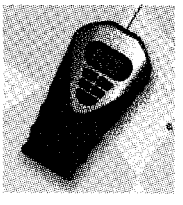

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practice; but she lived long enough to demonstrate that she had the courage and imagination to take the full measure of her fall, and struggle to gain the high ground once again.

She returned to London a famously failed revolutionary—scorned by many as an abandoned woman with a child—but one faithful old friend thought it a good thing to bring her together with William Godwin, whom she had met years before at Joseph Johnson's dinners, where neither had shown an interest in the other. Now, an odd sympathy emerged between them, one that blossomed quickly into wary attraction and soon gave way to sexual romance. It is here that the true radicalism of Wollstonecraft's life—and Godwin's too, for that matter—begins to play itself out.

William Godwin was a 40-year-old bachelor when he and Mary crossed paths again, cautious and thin-skinned, but genuinely high-minded; and, apparently, a man "with a reserve of feeling that women sensed and were drawn to." A lifelong republican, appalled by the outbreak of violence in France, he was still devoted to the romance of Enlightenment values. Now, in 1796, he was even more famous than Mary, his influential *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* having been published three years earlier. Known as the founder of philosophical anarchism, Godwin had a theory of moral behavior often described as utilitarian. He is best known for the notorious "fire cause," in which he posits that if a fire breaks out and you can save either an important thinker or a chambermaid who happens to be your mother, you must save the thinker, as his survival will do the most good for the most people. In short, Godwin was as innocent of the complications of emotional attachments as was Mary when she knew Gilbert Imlay.

They met in April and by July they were slipping notes under each other's doors (they lived around the corner from each other) three times a day. It is to this unusual correspondence that we owe the detailed account of how one man and one woman at the end of the eighteenth century set out to engage seriously with each other for the sake of self-understanding.

She makes the first move: comes to his house, and offers to spend the night. He panics, and sends her away. She sends a note, apologizing. He replies that he is "mortified." Why? she asks. Because when fantasy became reality, he froze. They try again, and this time it really goes badly. She sends a note referring to herself as a tree that had thought it was spring, only to have an unexpected "hoar frost" shrivel its efforts to bud. He answers stiffly that her note has put an end to all his hopes: "I needed soothing, & you threaten me. Oppressed with a diffidence & uncertainty which I hate, you...annihilate me." OK, OK, she says, let's try again. Success! "I am never so well pleased with myself," she writes, "as when I please you—I am not sure please is the exact word to explain my sentiments—May I trust you to search in your own heart for the proper one?" Yes, he replies, she can trust him to search for the proper word. Which they both go on doing for the next six months.

Remarkable as they are for the fullness with which they reveal an almost hourly change in the emotional barometer, what the notes do not record is that it is for the sake of their intellectual companionateness that they are undergoing this trial by sexual fire, in search of an inner independence that each intends to offer the other in the goodness of time. It was a thrilling project they were embarked on, and they both knew it. After Mary's death Godwin wrote to a friend, "Mere tenderness would not have been adequate to produce the happiness we experienced."

Each of them was famously on record against marriage, but she became pregnant, and it embarrassed her to have two illegitimate children. In March 1797 they married at Old St. Pancras Church. Six months later Mary was buried there. After she gave birth, the placenta failed to emerge. The midwife panicked and sent for the doctor, who rolled up his sleeves and reached in with unwashed hands, yanking out pieces of afterbirth and almost certainly infecting Mary with the septicemia of which she died twelve days later. She was 38 years old. The child she died giving birth to became Mary Shelley, wife of the poet and author of *Frankenstein*.

I wish I could say that this newest biography of Mary Wollstonecraft is the best, but I can't. Lyndall Gordon has produced a sprawling work that treats fully, and for no reason at all, every single person, episode or circumstance that even remotely touched Wollstonecraft's life. As a result, the drama of Mary herself often gets lost in the tedium of the digressive. For me, Claire Tomalin's 1978 biography—short, shapely, stirring—is still the best, the one that makes me feel most keenly the haunting suggestiveness of this life of lives.

What hurts most about Wollstonecraft's untimely end is the death of promise. She was, at the end, really just at the beginning. It is painful to contemplate what more she would have made of world-and-self had she

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lived to grow old. She had come to see that her own experience, properly understood and considered, could reveal a level of human need that might become the basis of a politics that would reflect the reality of that need rather than seek to suppress it. Two hundred years later, we are still struggling to bring to fruition the kind of insight that infused the spirit of this most remarkable of Enlightenment radicals. ■

Invisible Republic

SHASHI THAROOR

AN OUTLINE OF THE REPUBLIC.
By Siddhartha Deb. Ecco. 320 pp. $24.95.

"Do we always want to finish a story," asks the narrator of *An Outline of the Republic*, Siddhartha Deb's second novel, "or do we prefer to stop at a point where the story still makes sense to us?" The question goes to the heart of this book—a novel about the elusiveness of meaning and the slipperiness of stories, which stops at a point that, in a sense, seems short of its intended destination.

Amrit Singh, a frustrated journalist at a decaying Calcutta newspaper in the early 1990s, sets off for India's northeast on a quest for a woman in a mysterious photograph. The seven states of India's northeastern region are usually described in tourist brochures as "picturesque," a euphemism that accurately suggests both charm and underdevelopment. Amrit sees mainly the poverty and bleakness of the region, the violence lurking beneath the surface, the widespread "feeling of things about to collapse." He portrays a forlorn land, one "forgotten by the world," populated by people who are "provisional, uncertain...their personalities determined by the whimsy of immediate acts, so that no story taking place in that region was ever quite complete, no individual a rounded figure, and the outline of the region itself was traced by blurred, fluid boundaries that shifted back and forth with each fresh incident." The reader does not realize it at the time, but the narrator has just, in the novel's opening pages, described the book we are reading.

Amrit has stumbled upon a photo of a woman captured by terrorists and condemned to be executed; he has been persuaded by an acquaintance to track her down and write her story for a German magazine as one emblematic of all the mystery and the heartbreak of India. The assignment appeals to Amrit, promising a way out of the journalistic stupor into which he has sunk. He travels to the region, ostensibly on behalf of his Calcutta paper, hoping the story will set him free from his drudgery and breathe new life into his career. But Amrit is a somewhat frustrating narrator, all too content to while away his time in seemingly pointless activity, a writer who sees experiences as "merely transient moments flitting by as they transformed themselves into memories." His journey in search of Leela, the elusive woman in the picture, takes him across the region, but it is marked by indirection and ennui, and at the end of his travels he finds himself on a "spot on the periphery where I [had] found myself without knowing how I had got here, as if I had sleepwalked my way to the edge of the republic." Sleepwalkers rarely tell the most compelling of stories, which is the central problem with Deb's narrative.

An Outline of the Republic is a novel of the peripheral. It is set in a peripheral region, tucked away in the farthest reaches of the Indian republic, neglected and strife-torn. It is told by a peripheral narrator, at the margins of his profession, suspended from his job by a once-prestigious newspaper itself descending into failure and irrelevance. It features a succession of peripheral characters, their lives lived on the edges of anything that could remotely be considered central to the region's affairs. Even its plot is driven by a peripheral device, a photograph of an obscure figure that prompts an unlikely commission from an unknown foreign publication, leading the protagonist into a quest whose fulfilment never seems likely and may itself be peripheral to the author's concerns.

But at the edges of the republic the narrator finds stories—stories of intelligence

Shashi Tharoor is the author of The Great Indian Novel *and eight other books, including the forthcoming* Bookless in Baghdad.

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officers who want to be writers, writers who end up counterfeiting money, soldiers who try to launder that money, bank employees who flee for their lives from those soldiers. Amrit encounters an assistant manager of a tea garden carrying a briefcase full of rupee notes intended to pay off the insurgents terrorizing his company. He meets an ecologically minded government servant less interested in politics than in birds. ("The political turmoil is quite inconsequential," the official says. "The birds, the animals, the flora, that is what lasts.") He has a brief affair with the journalist wife of a separatist leader. Each of these episodes is little more than a vignette, hinting at possibilities left exasperatingly unexplored. Ultimately one stops looking for a point to these stories; the stories themselves, it becomes clear, are the point. Toward the end Amrit, in improbable circumstances, meets the writer-turned-counterfeiter, who strikes him as "a whirlpool into which the images and stories and characters I had collected could be abandoned, a final destination that promised nothing more than the complete silence of an anonymous repository." A novel, of course, is hardly an anonymous repository, and its narrator's aspiration to silence strikes this reader as both disingenuous and maddening.

This sense of a voice self-consciously advertising its own irrelevance, dealing with subjects doomed to the status of marginalia in the Great Indian Narrative, permeates the novel. On a long bus journey even "the road...seemed indifferent to us and our passing presence." Not far from the end, Deb writes:

> There is a school of Indian philosophy that says the condition of our existence verges on nonexistence, that we are more absent than present, creating a fragile material trace at one point in space that does nothing to alleviate our utter absence from all other spaces.... [Imphal] was a town dissolving bit by bit into a state of nothingness, crumbling into an ocean of absence, with each one of us in the town seceding in his or her own way from the blinding presence of the republic.

The republic's presence in this novel, however, is anything but blinding. Amrit hears about Malik, Leela's patron, a "creator of order in the wilderness," a "messenger of hope for an area plunged in darkness," an "emissary sent from the heart of the republic to its borders"—but Malik never appears except through what others say about him, and stories of his eventual disappearance are as unprovable as the rumors about his deeds and misdeeds. Even more than Leela, he is an elusive figure, made to carry great symbolic weight and yet completely insubstantial. As Amrit wallows in the perception that even solid objects are "mere props in a dream, powerless against the overwhelming absence—of light, of sound, of people, of purpose—that lurked everywhere," the reader has a constant sense, with the evaporation of each potentially significant development in the story, of grasping at straws in the wind.

And yet Siddhartha Deb is a highly intelligent writer, with a gift of phrase and a lovely sense of light and shadow in his descriptions. There is, in his prose, both beauty ("incidents flickering and dying out like fireflies in the dark night of the region") and wonder ("the pale dusk seemed suspended, afraid of the emphatic certainty of the coming darkness"), as well as insight ("a withered watchfulness...I associated usually with traders and politicians and bureaucrats, people who made a success of their lives through the observation and exploitation of the weaknesses and fallibilities of others"). Deb writes with a thoroughness of detail and a precision of style that recalls Joseph Conrad and Graham Greene. Greene, in fact, figures in the only comic episode in the book, an account of his arrest, on a 1961 visit to India, by security men who ask him to prove he is a writer by writing a story for them. Indian officialdom pronounces the result "a complete artistic failure," informs Greene he cannot be who he says he is and sentences him to write out repeatedly, "I shall not claim to be writer anymore." But this tale, told in a tone of mounting hilarity, is untypical of Deb's narrative, which is otherwise unvarying in its methodical pace. And for all of Deb's evident literary skill, his characters mostly sound alike, echoing the language, vocabulary and style of his narrator.

"Do you see the story?" asks Deb's epigraph, taken from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. "Do you see anything?" It is the question Siddhartha Deb leaves us with at the end of this elegant, haunting and yet ultimately unsatisfying novel. Conrad's next line, which Deb does not quote, goes on, "It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream." As with most dreams, this enigmatic novel fades too soon after the covers have been closed. But the author's talent is undeniable, and one looks forward to its application to a story that will finish where it set out to go, at a point that "makes sense" to all of its readers. ■

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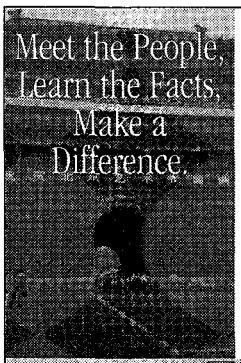

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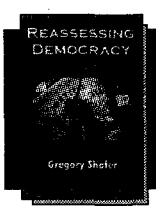

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(Continued From Page 2)

sobriety test in 1917. In March the Russian people, without instigation from the exiled Bolshevik leaders, overthrew the Romanov monarchy. They then began, also on their own, to desert the Eastern Front in droves, seize land from the landlords and take over the factories. This upheaval found political expression in the soviets—democratically elected soldiers', peasants' and workers' councils—whose authority soon came to rival that of the provisional government that had replaced the Czar. Its chief, Alexander Kerensky, was committed to the existing property regime as well as to the war aims of the Entente. The resulting crisis of dual power could be resolved in only one of two ways: the suppression of the soviets or the overthrow of the provisional government. The Bolsheviks chose the latter. Their insurrection (commonly referred to nowadays as the "Petrograd coup") was indeed an act of will. It was not, as Aronson implies, however, a blind leap but rather the culmination of a profound revolutionary process that the Bolsheviks sought to lead but neither created nor fully controlled.

The reigning academic orthodoxy that the provisional government, left undisturbed, could have ushered in a stable capitalist parliamentary regime is highly implausible. Despite the sober counsels of the Mensheviks, the masses were far too intoxicated with their newly discovered power to go back to the slaughter of the trenches or to return the land and workplaces to their former owners. Nothing short of the bloodbath the defenders of the old order were preparing could have restored the *status quo ante*. The Bolsheviks acted to prevent such an outcome.

The long-term consequences of their historic deed are ramified. But their early coalition with the Left Socialist Revolutionaries suggests that the Bolsheviks of 1917 did not necessarily aim for a one-party state, much less the Stalin dictatorship that emerged in the following years. By attempting to place all power in the soviets, Lenin and Trotsky pursued the only course open to those who drank deep of the possibilities of direct mass democracy unleashed by the collapse of the czarist empire and who took their revolutionary beliefs seriously enough to put them into action. JIM CREEGAN

ARONSON REPLIES

Detroit

■ Isn't it time we stopped mythologizing and blaming when talking about the Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Communism? I hoped instead to follow Isaac Deutscher's emphasis on understanding and explaining, but Jim Creegan won't let go of the myth of the Good Revolution and its democratic leaders. By mistakenly accusing me of blaming the Bolsheviks' decision to create a one-party state for Stalinism, he avoids the real issue: Didn't the seizure of power in 1917, and the earlier theoretical reframing of Marxism by Lenin ("the vanguard party") and Trotsky ("permanent revolution"), implicitly reject Marxism's insistence that socialism is possible only after a society has achieved deep and long-term structural and demographic processes of development? Marx: no urbanization and industrial revolution, no majority working class, no socialism.

When Creegan says that seizing power was "the only course open to those who drank deep of the possibilities of direct mass democracy" he reminds us that the Revolution's intoxicating effect is alive today. But Marxism still teaches, and twentieth-century experience further emphasizes, that there is no connection between the ability to take power in a backward country and maintaining the capacities to create a society worthy of the name—one that is democratic and humane. In taking "their revolutionary beliefs seriously enough to put them into action," Lenin and Trotsky equated the two abilities, and socialists as well as liberals are still paying for their political, intellectual and moral confusion. RONALD ARONSON

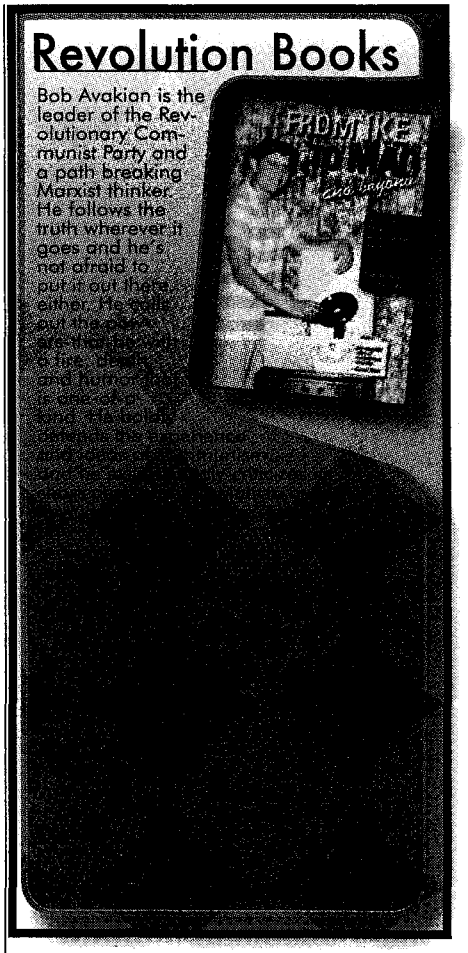
WHO KILLED ALDO MORO?

Missoula, Mont.

■ Frederika Randall, in "Fear and Loathing in Italy" [March 28], makes excellent points about Leonardo Sciascia's brilliance as a novelist. She also reviews *The Moro Affair*, Sciascia's interpretation of the 1978 kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro. While acknowledging that not everything in this book can be relied upon, she fails to point out its pioneering status in the vast conspiracy literature on the subject. For Sciascia, the principal villains of the Moro tragedy are not the Red Brigadists who killed him but the Christian Democrats, who, as Randall puts it, "did not want Moro to come back alive."

I examined the judicial archives in Rome for my 1995 book, *The Aldo Moro Murder Case*, and could find no evidence for Sciascia's indictment of the government. All the testimony presented at the many trials confirmed that the Red Brigadists, acting from Marxist-Leninist revolutionary motives, bore sole responsibility for Moro's murder. Subsequent research by Vladimiro Satta in *Odissea nel caso Moro* reiterated that the conspiracy theory was baseless. Reaching this conclusion after analyzing the documents produced by Parliament in its painstaking investigation, he specifically identified Sciascia's erroneous ideas that "misled many after him." In *Il caso Moro: Una tragedia repubblicana*, Agostino Giovagnoli concerns himself with the political context and significance of the story but not its "mysteries," which he mentions only to downplay.

For complex political and ideological reasons, Sciascia's unsubstantiated conspiracy theory has been accepted as gospel across a broad spectrum of public opinion in Italy. The general tenor of Randall's review endorses this conspiracy theory. *Nation* readers need to know that in the ongoing debate about the Moro murder case, the historical evidence flatly contradicts Sciascia's interpretation. RICHARD DRAKE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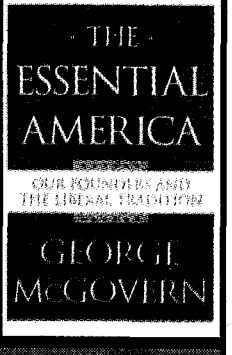

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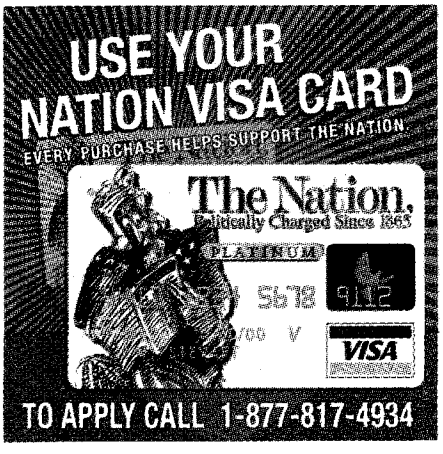

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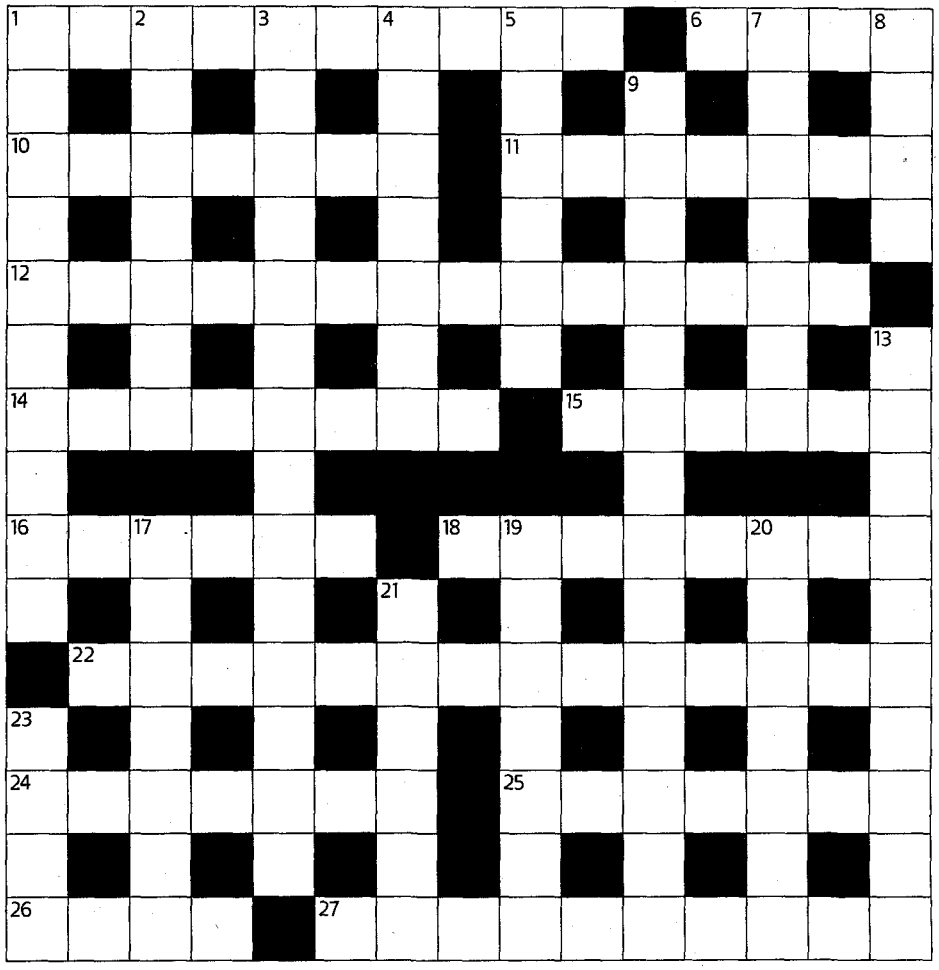

ACROSS

1 and **6** It certainly should be pretty moldy by now, suggested by the adherents of a wild-eyed reformer. (4,6,4)

10 All that's left of the porker might go to pot, as a way to sharpen up the inside medical degree. (7)

11 Parts of the hi-fi system might be considered real dogs, when they make low noises. (7)

12 The way his coat turned out made him infamous. (8,6)

14 What someone has to do before a person can head for the office, turning a bad name into this. (8)

15 Get in a bad way about having to beat somebody—possibly a little jerk. (6)

16 You certainly don't get on before the finish, but people might take exception if you do it to them. (6)

18 Old-fashioned collapsible headgear, with a rope the thing that gets wound around the lid. (5,3)

22 What the scale might do with things to cut the military down, as one might do before speaking. (5,4,5)

24 It seems a little coy for the secret organization to come back with such an old description. (7)

25 Game for this? It shows caution, peculiarly! (7)

26 Perhaps the first words spoken about art, according to some. (4)

27 One might be with loss of sleep, when the seers are sunk. (6-4)

DOWN

1 According to him, one like an early New Englander made some advancement. (4,6)

2 Bossy's quavering hymn, "Moo," has one word sounding like another, but has a double meaning in this case. (7)

3 Swift creature, of huge size. (14)

4 Childish game, like baseball, but you need a single tattered coat for it. (3,1,3)

5 Not the same old piece for players, but one's leading light was kindly. (6)

7 College means nothing to the songwriter, as this proves. (7)

8 Famous football coach, with the plaything flying up about the point. (4)

9 A practice phrase for speakers, asking what a relative of the purple bovine was up to. (3,3,5,3)

13 Taking an airplane, you have to sit up when it ends being done badly, and is thrown overboard. (10)

17 A gull might be, or a lamb. (7)

19 How to come on top with live rap, perhaps. (7)

20 Scarcely one can be found in it, in a manner capable of battling fatigue. (7)

21 Upon choosing your raingear, you can find it there. (6)

23 Probably what you call your lawn is much longer than this. (4)

PUZZLED? No more cross words. If you don't see why "Lures" are "Ground Rules" send for those of Mr. Lewis to: Puzzled, The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003, or access our website at www.thenation.com/about/crossword.mhtml.

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2990

W	I	N	D	I	N	S	T	R	U	M	E	N	T	S
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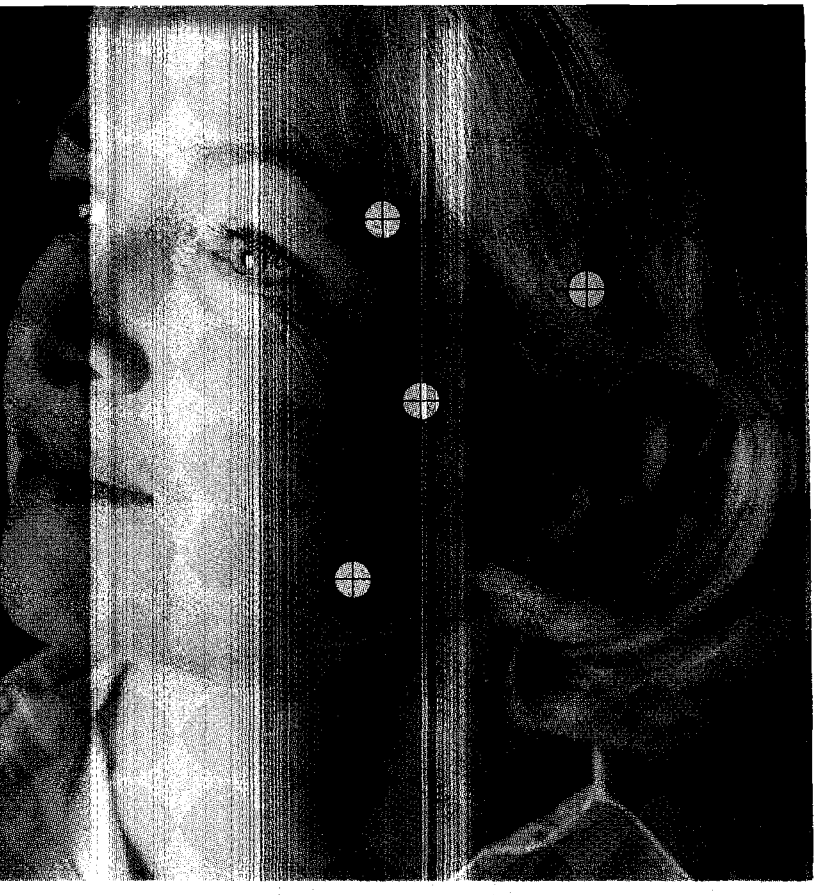
New phone technology improves on the human ear and helps those with mild to severe hearing loss.



FEEL your callers voice!

[illegible] DirectVibe™ pulsator delivers sound waves and vibrations through bone conduction. You'll be able to hear your caller's voice clearly.

When I hear a friendly voice on the phone, I get good vibrations, but lately I have had a hard time hearing conversations that used to be crystal clear to me. It wasn't my phone that was failing, it was my ears. Well our product research team has found a way to use new direct vibration technology so you can now hear conversations even if you live with mild to severe hearing loss. Hearing is all about the brain's recognition of vibrations, but for many of us, speaking on the phone has become a burden instead of a joy. The National Institute of Health says that one third to one half of us will experience some hearing loss as we age. We did not want to just accept this fact, so we worked with the brilliant scientists at Opentech USA who designed the Mirafone™. The Mirafone's patented DirectVibe™ pulsator actually delivers pulsating vibrations through the bones near your ears to improve speech and sound recognition. And it is compatible with hearing aids. This technology is far ahead of the simple amplifiers in some of today's phones. These pulsations are delivered directly to the brain and to the speech recognition center. Just apply the dime sized pulsator located on the headset against your head and you will be chatting away with the kids, grandkids, or your dear friends.

Mirafone Features:

- Visual ringer lights when the phone rings
- Redial
- Hold
- Flash
- Hands-free dialing
- Large keypad for dialing ease
- Also functions as a conventional phone
- Mirafone instructional video included

The product designers didn't stop there. The Mirafone includes a visible and an extra loud audible ringer so you can hear and see the phone ring. And the large keypad is so easy to read. The phone also works like a conventional phone if some in your house can still hear a pin drop. Popular Science even awarded this life improving technology the *"Best of What's New Award."*

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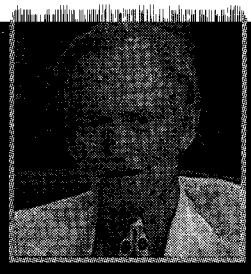
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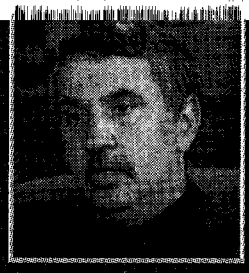
Cornel West

Amy Goodman

David McCullough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